

No 6

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WIDE AWAKE

A COMPLETE STORY WEEKLY EVERY WEEK.

THE NO-GOOD BOYS; OR, DOWNING A TOUGH NAME. *By A HOWARD DE WITT.*



Tess's taunt died in a shriek of terror that blended with the engine's frantic warning. "A coward, am I?" uttered Joe. "I'll show you!" The words came as he dashed headlong after the horse that was luring both to instant, awful destruction!

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THE NO-GOOD BOYS;

OR,

DOWNING A TOUGH NAME.

By A. HOWARD DE WITT.

CHAPTER 1.

A BULLY BANG FOR SPITE.

Joe Burton kicked over a chair with savage emphasis as he glared at the men.

"Confound thieves, anyway!" he muttered.

Frank Holden turned in mild surprise.

"But, Joe, these fellows aren't thieves," he protested. "They're working for a living."

"I know it."

"They have to do just as they're told, or lose their jobs."

"Oh, I haven't any grudge against those men over yonder—not even against the foreman," Joe Burton made haste to say. "Of course they're working for a living, same as I'd like to. But, if I only had some of the real railroad people here—"

"You'd—what?" asked Frank, wonderingly.

"I'd borrow Bill Rogers's gun and turn it loose on 'em—that's what I'd do!"

"Then you'd get in prison, Joe. You can't shoot everybody you don't like."

"More's the pity!" growled Joe.

There was a savage scowl on the face that usually was a stranger to ugly looks.

Yet Joe Burton had good and abundant reason for being savage this glorious May afternoon.

As he and Frank Holden sat on the back porch of the lit-

tle home that was Joe's all in the world—and Frank's, too, for that matter—the boys looked off upon a scene that was calculated to stir the bile of any American citizen whose toes were being trod on in the same fashion.

Joe was seventeen now. His father had been dead since he was four years old.

Mr. Burton had left his family this little house, a small stable and twenty acres of land.

The whole had been bought twenty years before for the sum of eight hundred dollars, but values in and around Stony Brook had risen since then.

Mrs. Burton had supported Joe—and also Frank, the orphan son of an old friend—by her earnings as a dressmaker.

But Mrs. Burton had died a year before this narrative opens. She had left barely enough to afford a decent burial.

Since then Joe had kept the place going—somehow.

He had left school and had worked at all sorts of jobs. He had peddled, he had made amateur photographs for summer visitors, he had served as guide to hunters, he had taken out parties in his dingy old sailboat on the lake—in a hundred and one ways he had turned to to make shift.

Frank Holden was a weak youngster at best. He was good and staunch, brave and truthful, and a great student.

He wanted to leave school and try to work, but of this Joe would not hear.

"It doesn't cost you anything to go to public school," Joe insisted. "You want to study and make something of yourself. The Burtons always meant that you should. Now that I'm the only Burton left I'm going to take the job in hand."

And so it had rested, against all protests.

Left alone in the world, but with this little property as his possession, Joe, being a minor, had to choose a guardian.

He had asked Lawyer Stone, a kindly, not very energetic old attorney, to act his guardian. Lawyer Stone, having accepted, the court appointed him.

There was nothing for a guardian to administer but the little homestead. Joe wanted to keep the old home and live there, so his guardian had consented.

Now had come the railroad and several corporations. They wanted to build up Stony Brook into something of a manufacturing center.

Much land was needed for the purpose, and prices of real estate had risen.

There were many who hinted that the railroad, which was taking more land than it seemed likely to want, was really condemning land with a view to selling it back later to some of the manufacturing corporations.

Some of the first people who sold land to the railroad sold cheaply and were sorry.

Others, getting wind of what was in the air, held out for better prices. Those who had the money to make a good fight won their prices. Others, who could not stand the expense of fighting through the courts, let their lands go at the railroad's prices.

Joe's guardian had been offered fifteen hundred dollars for the Burton property. Lawyer Stone had referred the railroad attorney to Joe himself.

"I won't sell at any such price," Joe promptly declared. "It isn't anywhere near what you're paying for other property in this neighborhood."

"It's all we'll pay," persisted the attorney.

"Then I won't sell. Just figuring on the basis of what you've paid other people around here, I want four thousand dollars, and I won't take a cent less."

"But we've got to have this land," retorted the railroad attorney, sharply.

"Then pay for it, like men," said Joe, simply. "Don't try to come around and rob a boy."

"We'll condemn the land, and get it through the courts—that's the law when a railroad needs land for improvements," warned the attorney.

"I know it," said Joe, simply. "But if you have this land condemned by the courts you'll have to pay a good deal more than you're offering me now."

"There are other ways, and you haven't got the money to fight," warned the attorney.

That had been six months ago. The railroad was actively pushing its work around Stony Brook now, but Joe had not sold.

Back of his place was the farm of William Downey.

Mr. Downey could sell his place, at a handsome figure, to a manufacturing concern that wanted the property.

Yet Mr. Downey's land would be of no value to the manufacturers unless Joe sold his little place to the railroad, to be used as freight and switching yards.

Farmer Downey, therefore, was still waiting for a chance to sell his place. He was fretting and fuming over the eighteen thousand dollars in good, hard cash that was held up by Joe's refusal to sell his home for less than half what it was worth.

Other people, too, in Stony Brook, felt that their chances of prosperity were being held back by Joe's stubbornness.

So far had this feeling gone that Joe could no longer get work from the store-keepers or farmers.

"He's no good, that boy," declared Farmer Downey, angrily.

Other folks took the same view. Joe had become something of an outcast in the village in these last few months, where he had once been tremendously popular.

Naturally, Frank Holden, from being Joe's friend, became "no good" also.

"How ever do those boys get along?" demanded one woman, spitefully. "I can tell you, for I've been missing things from my wood-shed, and off the clothesline, too! Those boys steal for a living!"

So widely had this story spread, and so thoroughly was it believed, that our hero found people turning their faces away when he approached them.

As for Frank, that poor, sensitive, dependent boy had been obliged to quit school the week before. He claimed not to be "feeling well," but the truth was that the other boys at school made his life misery to him.

And now, on this bright May day, things were coming swiftly to a head.

Though the railroad had not yet bought Joe's poor little property, yet for a week men had been working on the land.

They had been grading and getting ready to lay tracks.

To-day, close to the unused little barn, laborers were putting up a turn-table. It would be almost finished by night. This turn-table marked the center of the freight yards that the railroad people proposed to put on the land.

Joe had warned the railroad laborers off the land. They had only grinned at him. It was out of the question for Joe to fight forty husky men, so all he could do was to clench his hands, grit his teeth, and bear the outrage as best he could.

Of course our hero could have appealed to the courts, but Lawyer Stone had told him that it would take thousands of dollars to put up a legal battle against the wealthy railroad company.

"Oh, what's the use of being a boy, and poor?" groaned Joe, as he watched the railroad laborers working busily at the turn-table. "A poor boy hasn't any rights!"

"Especially when he's a 'no-good' boy," hinted Frank, with a smile that was meant to hide the pain.

"That's what folks are all saying!" cried Joe, fiercely,

his cheeks flaming. "They call us 'the no-good boys,' and folks who ought to be Christians hint that we get our living by stealing—you and I, Frank, who would sooner starve any day! But we'll show folks yet, Frank, old fellow, whether we're no good! Tough luck, and likely to be helplessly hungry any day, and then, on top of it all, a tough name to live down! Is it any wonder I'm sore on the world? And we're not thieves, Frank, but the victims of thieves who have money enough to found banks with!"

"Just how much money have we now?" whispered Frank, hoping to change the thoughts of his friend's thoughts.

"Fourteen dollars and nine cents!" promptly replied Joe, with the exactness of one who had counted the money over many times in secret. "That would be wealth, Frank, if I could get work to do; but I've got to stay here and watch this place, and nobody in Stony Brook will give me a sight at any kind of work to do. Oh, it's——"

Screech! Toot! Rumble! Past the front of the house whizzed an express train. The nearer track was barely twenty-five feet from Joe's lowly little front door.

"Sometimes I dream at night that the train is steaming right through the house," laughed Frank.

"It'll come to that soon, I suppose," Joe retorted, glumly.

"Company," said Frank, as he caught the rumble of buggy wheels and turned.

Joe, who had been sitting on the top step of the porch, shying pebbles at objects around him, turned his scowling face toward the buggy.

"Mr. Stone, eh? Good!" cried Joe, straightening up. "You needn't come, Frank. I want to talk to my attorney alone."

"Lively doings, Joe, lad, lively doings," commented the old lawyer, shaking his head as he pulled in his old gray nag to a stop.

"And you call this a free country!" cried Joe, bitterly. "A free country, and yet I haven't the power to stop thieves from coming and making themselves at home on my place. They're stealing everything from me."

"We have our laws, and our courts, of course," replied Lawyer Stone, solemnly. "I could go into court, of course, and get an injunction to stop the railway people. But they'd appeal, and then set on a regular legal battle, so what good would it do?"

"What right," demanded Joe, fiercely, "have those fellows to put up their turn-table on my land?"

"No right at all, of course," the lawyer replied.

"It ain't their land, is it?" demanded Joe.

"No."

"It's my land, ain't it?"

"Certainly, Joe."

"And yet I can't put those men off the land."

"You could, if you were strong enough," the lawyer replied.

"And I can't put that turn-table off this land?"

"Why, yes, you can, Joe, if you have the money to pay

for doing it. But it would have to be done during the night, and in one night at that, and it would cost a lot of money to move that heavy iron structure that weighs tons."

"Oh, I could move the turn-table in the night, then, could I?" Joe asked, a queer little gleam coming into his eyes.

"Yes, if there are no railroad men about to stop you."

"Could they do anything to me in the courts for moving it?"

"No, Joe, for this is still your land."

"If I moved the turn-table, do I have to be careful not to scratch it?" Burton demanded, sarcastically.

"Oh, no," came the laughing reply. "You can move it in any way you see fit, and with no regard to how much damage you do to the aforesaid turn-table."

"In ANY way? And the railroad people can't have me arrested?" Joe Burton persisted.

"That's a statement of your rights, Joe. Why? What's passing in your mind?"

"Oh, nothing!" sighed the boy, heavily. "But I'm glad to know my rights just the same."

As Lawyer Stone drove on, Joe came thoughtfully back to the porch.

"Frank," he asked of his sixteen-year-old friend, at last, "are you feeling fairly strong to-day?"

"Oh, yes!" came the cheery answer.

"Could you get on my old wheel and ride as far as Lincoln and back?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Get the wheel out, and I'll tell you."

Darting into the house, Joe went to his hiding-place in the chimney, from which he drew out the little cloth bag containing all the money he had in the world.

Sighing, he counted out some money. Carefully hiding the rest of the little hoard again, he hurried out to the back door.

Frank was already there with the bicycle, an old-fashioned, patched-up wheel that had seen many better days.

"Frank," and Joe's voice sank to a whisper, "go over to the store in Lincoln and buy five pounds of gunpowder. Be sure you don't spill any of it on the way."

Holden's usually pale face went as white as chalk.

"Joe," he gasped, "you don't mean——"

"I don't mean to do anything wrong. You ought to know that," Joe replied, doggedly. "I've just been talking with my lawyer. Whatever I'm going to do I have a right to do. Ain't that enough for you, Frank?"

"Quite enough," gulped Holden. Though shaking, he mounted the wheel and rode away.

"Perhaps other folks besides railroad people can play at being queer," grunted the boy, as he sat down in the porch.

There was a new and more meaning gleam in his eyes as he watched the noisy work of the railway laborers.

Thus he sat, for perhaps half an hour. Then——

Pit-pat! pit-pat! pit-pat! How well Joe knew that sound! And how quickly he colored as he heard it.

Tess Downey on her saddle mare. Tess, the prettiest girl for miles around!

Joe worshipped her!

And Tess? If she cared for Joe she had a mighty clever way of hiding the fact.

A proud little beauty at all times, dark-eyed Tess seemed to take an especial delight in flashing her eyes scornfully at poor Joe, who would have been happy at the privilege of dying for her.

But Joe bore all her wilful, haughty ways, hoping that, some day, she would know him better and think more of him.

Now, as Joe looked around, Tess had just slowed her mare down to a walk.

More than that—wonder of wonders!—she was smiling at the boy in an amazingly friendly way that actually warmed the friendless boy's heart.

"Good afternoon, Joe!" she hailed, pleasantly.

"Good afternoon, Tess!" Joe answered, scrambling eagerly to his feet and running to meet her, removing his battered old cap in the most graceful salute that he could make.

As he stood beside her horse, Joe held his cap in one hand, standing up stiffly straight, like a soldier, and looking frankly into her smiling eyes.

"I'm glad to see you're sensible at last, Joe," was Tess's next greeting.

"How's that?" smiled Joe, whose heart was thumping a measure of joy against his ribs.

"Why, you've sold your place to the railroad, I mean."

"I haven't done anything of the sort, Tess!" he cried, his face darkening swiftly.

"Then what are those men putting up the turn-table for?" asked the girl, in surprise.

"That's just it—the big, rich thieves!" blurted poor Joe. Then he broke into angry talk against the railway people.

"Why don't you sell, Joe?" Tess asked, at last.

"Because the thieves offer me only fifteen hundred dollars. My price is four thousand dollars. It's a fair price, going by what other people around here are getting. Lawyer Stone says I'm right, and to hold on until I get it."

"You'll never get it," said Tess, shaking her shapely head. "I should think you'd sell, Joe. Papa was talking, last night, about what a good chance you had to make something of yourself in the world."

"How?" Joe demanded.

"Why, he said you ought to sell at the railroad's price, put the money in the bank, go to work, get some good clothes and be respectable."

Joe flushed hotly as he glanced swiftly down at the very seedy clothes that he wore—his best, and all that he had in the world.

"Papa said that if you worked hard until you were twenty-one, then your money in bank would amount to

quite a good sum, and you could buy a store and settle down as a respectable and respected business man in the community."

"Would you care if I did, Tess?" Joe asked, anxiously.

"Why should I care?" Tess demanded, one of the old-time flashes in her eyes that made Joe's heart sink again. "Oh, yes, of course I would care," she went on more graciously. "I don't like to see any young American fellow growing up like a tramp."

"A tramp?" Joe did not repeat the words aloud, but under his breath. Was that the way she regarded him.

"It isn't bad advice, Joe," Tess went on, tightening her bridle and looking at him a little more pleasantly. "Think it over."

"I will," promised dazed Joe.

"Get up, Daisy!"

Without any nod of good-bye, Tess cantered away.

"Sell to the railway—save up—get—business—be respectable. Be respectable!" ran dully through the boy's mind as he went limply back to the porch and sat down. "I wonder if Tess'd care if I did?"

It was a wonderfully tempting bait!

Joe Burton cared more for pleasing Tess Downey than he cared for anything else on earth, except his own honest self-respect.

"Be respectable!" he groaned. "Then Tess means plainly that I ain't respectable now. She's like the others and calls me a 'nò-good boy!'"

For another hour in that noisy afternoon Joe battled between despair and the temptation to sell outright to the railroad.

Then Frank came back with the powder. . .

Joe started, guiltily. He wasn't anywhere near so sure, now, that he wanted those five pounds of black, shining stuff.

"Oh, well, I can sell it again, if I don't want it," he muttered to himself, as he put it carefully away in the bare little front parlor

Frank Holden asked no questions as he ate the coarse supper that Joe presently set out for them.

The day's work was over, and the laborers gone.

Once more the boys sat out on the back porch, both silent.

"Would it really make any difference with Tess if I gave into the railway people?" Joe asked himself, again and again.

Then, at last, the thought flashed upon him:

"This is all old Bill Downey's doings. He wants me to sell, so he can get the money for his place. He's mad at me. That didn't do him any good, so he got to talking to Tess, in hopes she'd be able to get me in line. Bill Downey, that won't do you any good, either, if you are Tess's father! I won't be made any fool of for anybody, by—hang!"

It took ten minutes more for Joe Burton to get his courage up to the sticking point. Then he disappeared into the house.

He came out again by the front door. Frank started and

paled when he saw Joe running silently toward the turn-table.

Half and hour later Joe came walking briskly back. There was a gleam in his eyes that showed that business was afloat.

"Let's take a little walk, Frank, old fellow," he proposed, hurriedly. "No time to lose, either."

Shivering a little, though the evening was warm, Holden rose and moved off at his chum's side.

They had not gone far down the road, when—

BANG! BOOM! The two explosions made the ground tremble as if in an earthquake shock.

"Oh, Joe! What—" Frank began, gaspingly, as he clutched at his friend's arm.

"It's all right," returned Joe, coolly, though his voice shook a little.

"The turn-table—"

"Exactly," nodded Joe. "I was within my rights, too. Lawyer Stone said so. Frank, old chap, that squares me some with the railway thieves. Wasn't that a bully old bang for spite?"

Joe led the way back to the house.

"Want to come out and look at the turn-table, Frank?"

"No-o-o-o."

"All right! I'll be back in a minute."

There was a dark, but delighted, grin on Joe's face as he came back from a look at what was left of the turn-table.

"I didn't get it off the land, Frank, but I moved enough of it so that the railroad folks will have to put in a new turn-table if they want to use one. Now, maybe they'll settle with me. Come on to bed before folks come around to ask questions. But don't be afraid, Frank, old chap. They can't do nothing to me. It's on my land. They can't do anything to me—Lawyer Stone says so!"

CHAPTER II.

THEN THERE WAS A ROW!

Joe Burton peered through the blinds the next morning with a happy smile on his face.

The first of the railway laborers had gotten along.

These were standing staring, in dazed fashion, at what was left of the big turn-table.

Most of it was there for that matter. The five pounds of powder hadn't boosted much of the material. But the big explosion had wrecked the turn-table, as a working machine, so completely that it couldn't even be repaired.

Frank Holden had gotten over trembling. His face was very white, yet very firm and hard, as he stood at Joe's side peeking through the blinds.

"There's the foreman," came, in a chuckling whisper, from our hero. "Whee! Don't he look mad! Hullo! He's coming this way, and in a hurry!"

Just a few moments later there came a sharp tap-tap on the back door.

Joe pulled it open promptly.

Foreman Garvice's face was black with wrath.

"This is a pretty how-de-do!" blurted the foreman, stormily.

"What's wrong?" Joe asked, pleasantly.

"As if you didn't know! That turn-table—"

"Oh, I can't be held responsible for any railroad property that you leave lying around loose on my land."

Foreman Garvice swallowed hard, as if he were choking. Then he blurted out:

"You young whelp, you'll find that it's a mighty serious business, blowing up other people's costly property."

"Who said I blew it up?" Joe demanded, smilingly.

"Who else did, if you didn't?" roared the purple-faced fellow.

"The puzzle-counter is two aisles to the right," Joe grinned. "Don't stand around asking fool questions."

"You'll find out—a whole lot of things!" roared Garvice, shaking his fist at the boy.

"I hope so. Live and learn! It's a fool who wastes a whole day without learning anything," quoth Joe, smiling hard from sheer good humor.

With an angry snort, Garvice turned on his heel and tramped away.

All the laborers were on hand now. First putting them to work to get down the wreck of the turn-table, and leaving his foreman in charge, Garvice went off to telephone.

He soon came back in a hurry, shouting orders that caused his men to drop their work in a hurry.

"He's telling his men to stop until the railroad's lawyers look over the wreck," Joe called softly into the kitchen, where Frank was washing the few breakfast dishes.

Leaving half a dozen men to guard the place, Garvice led the rest of the gang away.

"It's going to be a holiday on the Burton farm to-day," Joe called in, mockingly, to his chum.

Then all was so quiet and dull that Joe went inside, picked up one of Frank's few books, and began to read.

Thus the forenoon passed. The boys ate their dinner with a queer sense that something was going to happen.

"Here comes a new crowd," called Frank, early in the afternoon.

Joe dropped his book and stole to the window, peeking out through the blinds.

"That's Stillman, the railroad lawyer," Joe announced. "He's the same chap, you remember, that tried to bluff me into selling."

"Who are those men with him?" Frank asked, curiously, for Stillman was accompanied by three other men.

"I don't know. Railroad detectives, perhaps."

Stillman and his companions explored the wrecked turn-table for some minutes. Then they came to the door and knocked.

"Good afternoon," Frank greeted, pleasantly, as he opened the door.

"Where's that other young scoundrel?" demanded Stillman, gruffly.

"Meaning me?" smiled Joe, appearing behind his friend.

"See here, Burton, what rascally business have you been up to?" ground out the railway lawyer, savagely.

"What are you talking about?" Joe came back.

"That turn-table——"

"Oh! Your folks must be more careful, after this, about leaving their property on other folks' land," smiled Burton.

"You'll find out all about that!" roared Stillman, while his three companions looked on, silently.

"What do you mean, sir?" Joe asked, pretending to be mystified.

"You'll find there's a law in this land, Burton!"

"Law?" smiled Joe. "Oh, yes, if you want to know anything about the law, I'll refer you to an expert. Go to Lawyer Ephraim Stone, in the village. He handles all my legal business, and he's a good one. You can't do better than go to him. Good day!"

Bang! Joe's door shut noisily in the faces of his callers.

Then our hero smiled meaningly at his chum as they stood behind the door and heard the railroad people stamp heavily away.

"Why, they've called off the laborers that were watching over at the turn-table this morning," Frank reported presently.

"Storm's over, then," laughed Joe. "Let's go out and enjoy the sunshine."

Their old seat on the porch the boys occupied once more. Frank began to study, Joe reading an old magazine that some one had given him months before.

"Why, there's Nobby Blake over there," whispered Frank, glancing up from his book and looking in the direction of the shattered turn-table.

Joe looked up, quickly. "Nobby" Blake was a rather lanky-looking youth of eighteen. His nickname came from the fact that he seldom dressed much better than a tramp.

He was not a pleasant fellow, either, though Joe had always tried to treat him well, because "Nobby" was Tess Downey's cousin.

"Wonder what he's doing over there," murmured Frank.

"Don't care much," Joe grinned. "There ain't anything over there that he can hurt much."

"Good afternoon, boys. Just came over to put your house a bit to rights. I guess it needs it, don't it?"

Miss Mehitable Strong had just crossed the railway track. She belonged to the village home missionary society, and believed that all charity began at home. One of her hobbies was to come once a week and do what she could to straighten out the interior of Joe's "bachelor hall."

"It's awfully good of you, Miss Strong," Joe murmured, gratefully.

"Is it?" chirped Miss Mehitable, as she pranced in over the sill. "Being good's one of my specialties, Joe. And if I just stay at home, being good, no one else knows about it. Ain't that right?"

A minute later they heard the sweet-souled old maid singing at her self-imposed work inside.

"I wish everybody in Stony Brook was like her," sighed

Joe. "Then we'd find some fun in living. Frank, I guess I'll go over and take a look at the turn-table."

He rose and walked away, looking rather curiously at Nobby Blake, who was still standing beside the battered piece of railway property.

"Here, there!" hailed Nob, pompously.

"Hullo!" greeted Joe.

"Get back there!"

"What's that?"

Joe halted in sheer amazement, for Nobby's voice was not only commanding, but pompous.

"Get back there, I say!" roared Nob. "You can't come over this way. Now, then, are you going to get back?"

The funny side of being ordered off his own land, and by a lanky, insignificant snip like Nob, struck Joe all at once.

He actually turned and walked back toward the house, as if afraid of Nobby Blake.

But Nob, mistaking the signs, came strutting over in our hero's tracks.

"You needn't go over to that turn-table any more," hinted Nobby.

"Who says so?" asked Joe, with mock meekness.

"I do."

"And who on earth told you to say it, Nob?" demanded young Burton, seating himself on his porch, and looking at the other youth.

"The railroad folks," replied Nob, with importance. "They've hired me to see that you don't cut up any more monkey shines."

This announcement the young fellow delivered with such positiveness that our hero did not, for a moment, doubt him.

But Joe looked up shrewdly at Blake.

"Nob, I guess you've got your job twisted. You seem to think that the railroad folks want you to act as a sort of special policeman. Now, as a fact, I guess they mean for you to snoop around here on the quiet, and do the dirty work of a mean, common spy?"

"Who's a spy?" demanded Nobby, fiercely.

"You're not," laughed Joe. "You're too transparent. Any one can see right through you. But, just the same, that's the dirty job the railroad folks expected of you."

"Is it?" blazed Blake, fiercely, and shooting his chin out tauntingly. "Then they ought to have hired you, and not me. I ain't one of the 'no-good boys.'"

"Stop that," warned Joe, his face blackening.

"I don't steal," went on Nob, wickedly.

"Do you FIGHT, then?" whipped out Joe, swift as a flash, as he leaped to his feet.

"Don't you dare hit me!" warned Blake, retreating a couple of steps.

"Put up your hands, you dog!" quivered Joe, his face white and set. "If you don't, I'll smash you, anyway!"

Nobby retreated slowly before his warlike foe. Joe struck out, as a feint, to make Blake put up his hands.

The feint worked. Then Joe, who as angry as he had ever been in his life, sailed in.

Swat! Biff! A right-hander on the nose that made Nobby shriek. A left-hander against the jugular.

Down went Blake, howling with pain and fright.

Joe stood shaking over him, but a little cooler now that he had let off some steam.

"Now, get up and go on fighting—or apologize!" ordered young Burton, crisply.

"Here! Stop that! For shame!" cried a clear young voice.

In his excitement Joe had been deaf to two sounds. One was the distant rumbling of an express train, and the other the pit-pat! of the hoofs of Tess Downey's mare.

But now Tess was on the scene herself, reining up her animal snappily.

Joe turned, to find the panting mare within three feet of him, and Tess Downey regarding him with blazing eyes in which scorn and contempt blended.

"How dare you?" demanded Tess, with the air of an angry queen.

But Joe was in no meek mood himself now.

"I dare knock the head off of any loafer who calls me a thief!" he declared, hotly.

Toot! toot! Tess's mare was growing restive over the nearer, more crashing sound of the express train.

"You haven't any right to hit my cousin," proclaimed the girl.

"Yes, I have, when he talks that way," contradicted Joe. "And he's no good if he needs a girl to take his part!"

"You coward!" branded Tess, her eyes flaming.

Joe started back aghast, as if she had struck him with her riding-whip.

Toot! toot! shrieked the whistle of the express engine, now almost at the house.

Frightened, the mare bolted.

Tess's taunt died in a shriek of terror that blended with the engine's frantic warning.

"A coward am I?" uttered Joe. "I'll show you!"

The words came as he dashed headlong after the horse that was now madly luring both on to instant, awful destruction!

He caught at the bridle, held on for grim life, but his boyish weight was not enough to drag the maddened animal back.

They were at the track, the rushing engine looming up as big as a mountain before Joe Burton's quivering eyes!

CHAPTER III.

THE LOWEST-DOWN TRICK ON EARTH!

Whirr-rr! Crash-sh! BOO-OOM!

The noise was in Joe Burton's ears with maddening din as he held on there for Tess's life.

As he clutched at the bridle, his back turned to horse and rider, Joe's eyes stared affrightedly at the nearer rail of the track.

The mare should not cross that! Tess should not be killed!

Joe saw his own left foot hit the rail.

He tried to draw it back, though this was not his main effort.

In truth, he hardly thought of himself.

Then he held determinedly on, for what seemed to be ages.

When one is in deadly peril the seconds seem drawn out to hours.

Joe did not shout to the horse.

He seemed to realize that his words would be drowned out in the roaring rumble of the mile-a-minute train.

Something stung Joe Burton in the foot, and then he saw the engine whizz by him, black and monstrous.

The boy did not wonder what ailed his foot, but exerted a few more frantic ounces of remaining strength in tugging the horse back out of harm's way.

Now the terror-stricken mare was trying to wheel and dash back from the train, but Joe held on, though it felt as if his arms were being torn from the sockets.

If the mare were allowed to wheel swiftly about, she might toss off Tess, throwing that precious girl under the train-wheels.

Joe saw the cars whizz by his face, their motion and speed making him sick and dizzy.

Then, suddenly, Joe saw the clear fields the other side of the track.

The train had passed!

Frank Holden had the presence of mind to rush forward. He caught Tess Downey, as she came tumbling, more than half-fainting, from the saddle.

Capable and energetic Mehitable Strong, who had witnessed the affair from a window, had immediately jumped through to the ground, and now she, too, came rushing up.

As for Joe, he did the most inglorious thing.

Now that the danger was over, he sat limply down on the ground, though he still gripped the bridle as if on no account he let it go.

Nob, the last to reach the scene, now grabbed at the bridle.

"Let me have it, Joe," he ordered, quaveringly.

"Bless that boy!" cried Miss Mehitable, as she flew at Joe. "Is he hurt?"

"No, Miss Strong, why should I be?" asked Burton, dully, as he turned around. "Gracious! Has Tess fainted?"

"No, she hain't, the little gad-about!" rang Miss Strong's voice, sharply. "But you're hurt; I can see it. You let me get you to the house. Now, mind, Joe Burton!"

Without more ceremony, the big-hearted old maid gathered Joe up in her arms and started grimly for the house with him.

"I want to see if Tess is hurt," protested Joe, trying to free himself.

"She ain't a bit, I tell you, the little flirt!" rasped Miss Strong.

"Please don't say that, Miss Strong," urged Joe, in a

low tone. "I'd fight the man who talked like that about Tess."

"Oh, would you, now?" snapped Miss Strong. But her old eyes became suddenly tender. "There, sit down in that chair and let me see what ails you!"

"It's nothing, except that my left foot stung a little," Joe replied.

"Land sakes!" cried the good woman, as she looked at the shoe.

That shoe was shabby enough, at best. But now its toe was ground to a shredded pulp.

"That's where the edge of the wheel ground it," choked Miss Strong. "Wait! I'll get that shoe off real careful."

"Why, you don't need to, Miss Strong," laughed Joe. "The foot ain't really hurt. Don't you see, there ain't no blood. And I can walk on the foot. See!"

Joe got up and walked eagerly away, hobbling slightly.

Miss Strong followed him to where Tess sat on the ground, supported by Frank and Nobby. She was half-crying, half-laughing, while her mare, now quieted, stood looking wonderingly on.

"You want to get home to your mother, Tess," broke in Miss Strong. "You ain't hurt, but you've got a touch of nerves. Don't you dare ride that horse home, either. Nobby, you lead it. Tess, you take my arm."

Joe watched them go away, without speaking and without offering to follow.

Tess's contemptuous taunt came back to him, and his cheeks flamed. He hobbled back to the porch.

There he and Frank were sitting, in silence, half an hour later, when Tess's brother, Bob, drove up in a surrey.

Bob was seventeen, just a year older than his sister, and he was a young man who "felt his oats."

"Hullo, there, Joe Burton," he hailed. "Pop wants you to come over to the house."

"Does—does he?" demanded Joe, without showing any great enthusiasm.

"Yep; he wants to thank you for being so handy about Tess and the mare. And Tess wants you to come to. Tess said to say she wanted particular to have you come."

Joe hesitated; then the message from Tess decided him.

"I'll go," he said, shortly.

"And you're to come, too, Frank Holden," announced Bob Downey.

Frank followed, without a word.

Bob said nothing, except to the horse, while he drove over to the big and roomy, prosperous-looking Downey farm-house.

Joe was beginning to feel sorry that he had come, when he caught sight of Mr. and Mrs. Downey on their front porch, waving frantically at him.

Their faces shone with cordiality.

"Oh, you dear boy!" cried Mrs. Downey, running down the steps and throwing her arms around Joe as he got out of the surrey.

She kissed him warmly, twice.

"You're the right kind of a youngster, after all, I

reckon," said Bill Downey, as he stamped down to meet Joe and grip his hand. "If it hadn't been for you—gosh! But I'm going to make it right, Joe!"

Burton was seated in a big porch chair. Then Mrs. Downey caught sight of Joe's crushed shoe-front and asked anxious questions.

"Oh, it's nothing," our hero assured her. "I was watching the track, and so got my foot out of the way."

"But it spoiled a pair of shoes, anyway," retorted Mrs. Downey. She ran into the house and brought out a pair of Bob's—almost new.

Joe protested, but she insisted on putting on the new shoes. Then again she disappeared.

"Now, Joe, I don't want you to think I'm stingy," began Farmer Downey clumsily, as he thrust one hand into a trousers pocket and brought out a roll of bills.

"Say," gulped Joe, aghast, "you don't think I can take money for THAT?"

"I reckon you need a little money," persisted Downey.

"Oh, I've got enough," returned Joe, airily. "And you won't say any more about money, Mr. Downey, unless you want to see me scooting for home."

Farmer Bill Downey tried, clumsily enough, to force money on the boy, but without success.

"I heard Tess wanted to see me," said Joe, presently.

"Oh, she'll be here in a minute," returned Downey.

And before long Tess appeared and came forward, holding out her hand, which Joe took awkwardly as he arose from his chair.

Mr. and Mrs. Downey went inside. Frank vanished in his own silent way. As for Bob, that youth had turned and walked moodily away the instant that he saw his shoes on Joe's feet.

So Joe and his young queen were alone on the porch.

"Are you all right now, Tess?" Joe inquired, half-timidly.

"Why, don't I look all right?" she asked, surveying him with laughing eyes.

"Look all right" she certainly did. With girlish instinct she had donned one of her prettiest, fleeciest white summer gowns—all lace and ribbons, as Joe gropingly comprehended. Her hair was done up jauntily, and decked with a ribbon and a rose. Her feet were in the neatest of little slippers, showing a glimpse of silk stocking at the ankles. Yes, Tess "looked all right"!

But Joe, despite his utter shabbiness, had put on a new dignity in the last few minutes.

"Will you forgive me?" Tess asked, softly, as he looked at her.

"What for, Tess?"

"For—for what I called you."

"That—that depends, Tess."

"What on earth do you mean, Joe?" she asked, opening her eyes in surprise.

"See here, Tess, you said a mean thing that wasn't true," Joe replied, quietly.

"I know it. But haven't I apologized?"

"Yes; but that won't be quite enough," Joe hinted, in the same quiet way.

"Must I go down on my knees to you?" she demanded, laughing, but with a look of pride flashing in her eyes just the same.

"No, Tess; that wouldn't please me any, and wouldn't do any good in any way. But, if we're going to be friends now, it'll have to be on a different basis from what it has been."

"Perhaps you'd better explain what you mean, Joe," Tess replied, staring at him with just a hint of the look that used to make him meek.

"Well, Tess, if we're going to be friends, then we've got to be friends—real friends. Friends don't hurt each other's feelings. Friends are always glad to see each other. Friends speak pleasantly, and try always to cheer each other on in life."

"Where'd you ever learn so much about friends?" Tess asked, mischievously.

"I had some—once. I've got one now," Joe answered, flushing, and Tess Downey was sorry in an instant.

"Go on, Joe, please."

"If we're to be friends, Tess, we must always think well of each other. When we meet, it must be 'good morning, Joe,' and 'good morning, Tess.' You'll smile, and I'll lift my hat and make my best bow. And you'll always be kind, Tess, and I'll always do anything on earth that I can for you. Those are my terms, Tess."

Joe stared so hard at the girl that she looked down in confusion.

But at last she looked up, shyly and meekly.

Then, rising, she held out her hand.

"I apologize on those terms, Joe!"

He, too, was on his feet, his hand meeting hers frankly, and holding hers in a little tighter grip than society folks call "good form."

Then they sat down and talked again, and Joe had the most wonderful and happy afternoon he could remember.

He and Frank stayed to tea, too.

Farmer Downey again tried, but failed, to press money on Joe, who, prouder than any king, turned the offer off gently but firmly.

It was after dark when the boys started home.

Joe Burton, on whom a new world seemed to have dawned, was happy and silent.

Frank Holden, who, like a true friend, understood all, was silent, too.

And so they walked until they came near the home—or where the home ought to have been.

For Joe, as he came over a little rise in the road near the track, came to a sudden, thunder-struck halt.

"Why, Frank! Where—what—oh, Frank!"

But Holden was equally speechless, and no wonder.

Where Joe's shabby little cottage had stood was now nothing but a great, rubbishy heap of old timbers and plaster.

Off where the barn had been was another heap.

"Why, what—when—what's happened?" choked Joe.

"The railroad people!" came in a yell of agony from Frank Holden.

"They've torn down our buildings—the unhung scoundrels!" sounded Joe Burton's anguish-laden voice.

Frank set off at a faltering run, Joe following as fast as his still lame foot would permit.

They halted again by the pile of ruin that had once been their little cottage home.

Complete enough the wrecking had been. Not an upright stick of timber had been left standing.

"That's the railroad's answer to your work last night," gasped Frank.

"That's what!" clicked another voice, as a man stepped forward from behind an apple-tree.

"Who are you?" flared Joe Burton, wheeling upon the fellow like a flash.

"Watchman for the railroad," grinned the stranger. "Burton, you've been stubborn with the road long enough. They took possession this afternoon. Of course, you've got a remedy against the road—fight it out in the courts."

"Fight it out in the courts?" quivered Joe. Well enough he knew what show he would have in the courts against the railroad—he, a penniless boy.

Penniless? That thought sent Joe headlong into the pile of wreckage.

But after a few minutes he paused, panting. The watchman had already strolled off.

"Frank," gasped Joe, reeling, "that's the lowest-down trick on earth! Even our little hoard of money is gone!"

CHAPTER IV.

WHERE THE MOST MONEY IS!

"If you want money, go where the most money is," quoted Joe, grimly.

"I hope there's going to be some money loose in this part of the town this morning," replied Frank, trying to look cheerful.

They were standing at the street end of the great Fall River Line pier in New York City.

From down the pier came the sounds of a great steamer docking.

The crowd would be off soon.

Among the hundreds of passengers who would come out this way our young friends hoped to find two who would want their hand luggage carried to the nearest train, or, perhaps, to a hotel.

For Joe and Frank were in New York on this hot summer day.

And this was the kind of work they had come to!

"If you want money, go where the most money is!" Joe had heard a man say that once, giving it as a reason why every hustling young American should seek his fortune in the great city of New York.

It had seemed as wise as anything else to do.

There was nothing left of the old home—not even a chicken-coop to crawl into.

Early on the morning after the wrecking of the home by the railroad people, Joe and Frank had walked into Lawyer Stone's office.

That good old gentleman had been sympathetic enough, but had given it as his best advice that a penniless boy would have a hard time fighting a great, wealthy railroad.

"Don't ask 'em to settle just yet," advised the lawyer. "Wait, and let 'em get to guessing what you mean to do. Let 'em go ahead and put in their tracks and other improvements. Bye and bye, maybe the railroad folks will get nervous about a big damage suit piling up. Then, perhaps, they'll settle with you for a higher price than they would to-day. If not, you'll have to sell your claim, at the best price you can get, to some one who can afford to sue the railroad in the courts. Of course, I'll write the railroad folks, and make your claim for you. But, if we settle right now, Joe, you'll lose most of what you ought to get. Better wait."

From the lawyer's office Joe and Frank turned down one of the side streets of the village—and left Stony Brook behind.

They had headed for New York, full of the determination to make some kind of a "strike" in that great, busy, wealthy city.

How they got to New York does not matter. It was simply the old story of long, footsore tramps, with an occasional ride on some farmer's wagon.

They had been three weeks on the way, occasionally picking up an odd job that brought them a little cash or food.

They had reached New York with nine cents between them.

For a week, now, they had been in New York. Here they had managed to sleep, somehow, though not once in a paid-for lodging.

They had eaten, after a fashion, by the aid of the few nickels they had earned.

Last night they had slept on a dray that stood at the curb on West Street.

This morning they had not eaten. They had three cents, but chose not to spend it until later in the day.

Though hungry, they were not dirty. The weather was so hot that the street hydrants were turned on that teamsters might water their horses.

At one of these hydrants they had washed, though without the aid of soap.

Now, they stood waiting at the street end of the great pier, hoping for fortune enough to buy them a breakfast.

"If we ever get two dollars together," proposed Joe, drily, "we'll use the money to get out of New York with. No more great city for me, where there's nothing to do—and millions to do it! Why, Frank, the farmers would be glad to give us board and wages at this time of the year!"

"Here comes the crowd off the steamer," said Frank, quietly.

A dozen other boys—regular New York street-Arabs—jostled with them in the effort to find "business."

"Carry your grip! Grip! grip! Carry your grip, sir?" asked Joe, darting in close to a passenger with a dress-suit case.

Frank Holden stuck close, but trying his luck with other people.

"Carry your—" began Joe, turning to another passenger.

Then he stopped short, cold chills running down his spine.

"Great Scott!" chattered Joe, inwardly, and longing to turn and run. "Bill Downey and his wife and Tess."

It was too late to run, though, for Bill Downey was staring hard at our hero.

"Jigger me if this ain't Joe Burton!" gasped the farmer.

"Why, so it is!" cried Mrs. Downey. "And Frank Holden, too. So this is where they bolted to. How are you, boys? I'm real glad to see you!"

And Tess was looking, with all her eyes.

But quickly she moved through out at the edge of the jostling crowd, and held out her hand.

"Good morning, Joe!"

She was smiling, but there was a look in her eyes that made Joe feel, hotly, that she was laughing at him.

"Have you boys come down to this?" queried old Bill Downey, bluntly.

That question made Joe color more hotly than ever.

"We've tried hard to make a start in New York, but haven't succeeded very well so far," Frank put in, very quietly.

"Humph! I should say not. I want to have a talk with you boys, and see if something can't be done to get you a little better on your feet," said Farmer Downey.

"We've done very well," put in Tess, hurriedly, and smiling still as she looked at Joe. "Father sold the property, and so we've come to New York for a while."

"I've come to New York to see if I can't make money quicker than I did in the country," announced Mr. Downey, importantly. "I've got a good bit of capital to go into business with. Maybe I'll have something of a job for you youngsters when I get started in business."

"We're going to the St. Denis Hotel," added Tess. "You'll try to drop in often and see us, won't you, boys?"

"Looking as we do?" blurted Joe, flushing a still deeper shade of red.

"Oh, you won't be down on your luck long in New York," predicted Tess, her eyes shining, though from what reason Joe could not guess. You'll get ahead, all right."

"I don't believe these boys have breakfasted," cried Mrs. Downey. "Now, boys, you'll come right along with us and have a good, filling meal."

There was something so positive in the good woman's tone that, though he looked suddenly a little glum, Bill Downey did not dispute his wife's invitation.

And Tess jumped into the breach quickly.

"Dad, get one of these other boys to carry your bag. I'm going to walk with Joe and Frank."

"No, you're not," retorted Joe, quickly. "Do you think, Tess, that I'd have you seen in New York walking with two such down-trodden specimens as Frank and I are to-day? Not for anything! You walk along with your folks, and we'll walk along at a little distance behind."

"Oh, very well, Joe," said Tess, after flashing a quick look at him. "But keep close."

As the Downeys started off, Joe and Frank fell in a little behind.

But at the first turning of a corner Joe gave Frank a sudden tug backward.

Then the pair turned, fled—bolted!

CHAPTER V.

THE MAN WHO DROPPED FROM THE SKIES.

It was no part of Joe's plan to go near the Downeys while he and Frank were so plainly down on their luck.

The two boys got through the day, somehow, eating by the aid of the few nickels they picked up.

Without breakfast again, they went to the steamboat pier the following morning to tempt luck again.

They were there half an hour too early.

Yet they had not waited more than five minutes when a stranger sauntered up to them.

He looked to them like a well-dressed man. The truth was that he was dressed in the most flashy style, but Joe and Frank, ignorant of the city life, did not understand this.

"I was noticing the friends who spoke to you yesterday morning," began the stranger. "Looked like mighty nice people."

"They are," Joe answered, stiffly.

"Been friends of yours long?"

"Quite long."

"I was interested in them," the stranger went on, "because they looked so much like people that I knew once. Now, for a guess, their names are——"

The stranger paused, as if searching his memory.

"Downey," Joe supplied, innocently. "William Downey is the man's name."

"Not the Downeys of Greenport?" asked the stranger, looking suddenly more interested.

"No; they come from Stony Brook."

Then, before Joe realized it, the stranger, who appeared to be very genial, had pumped our hero quite dry of information as to the Downeys, the hotel they were stopping at and all about them.

"I was sure I knew them," said the stranger at last. "Hope I'll meet 'em before they go back home. Well, boys, so long."

Within ten minutes a much different-looking man accosted Joe.

This man was young, fresh-faced, smiling—he had much of the look of a young clergyman about him.

"My boy," he began, speaking kindly, "I've been watching you and your friend. You don't seem like the run of other boys around here."

"We're from the country, if that's what you mean," smiled Joe.

"Ah, I was sure you were not used to this life. Boys, will you do me a great favor by coming to breakfast with me?"

"We—we don't like to take charity, thank you," cried Joe, flushing.

"And nobody will ask you to accept charity," promised the stranger, still smiling. "Really, boys, you will be doing me the greatest kind of a favor if you will come along to breakfast with me. I'll explain as we eat."

"But we ought to stay here and try to earn something," protested Joe, trying to find a way out of what looked like an offer of charity.

"Oh, you won't lose anything by coming with me. Boys, I believe I can help you to make a real start in New York. That's my object in making your acquaintance. Won't you come with me—please?"

Their empty stomachs supplied the answer.

They turned and followed their guide, who led them to one of the plainer restaurants near-by.

There they found themselves being treated to one of the best meals they had eaten in many months.

"Now, to get to our business," said the stranger, as he watched with satisfaction the appetites displayed by the boys. "I must explain that I am a clergyman. I have a little fund, entrusted to me for helping out boys in just your position. Now, then, I want to take you with me, after breakfast, and see you rigged out in better clothing. That will be the first step in a start for you."

"But that's charity, ain't it?" demanded Joe, coloring again.

"It is, or it isn't, just as you boys make it," smiled the minister. "When I get through with you I shall take your notes for the sums I have spent on you. If you do well, and are honest enough to pay the money back to me, bye and bye, then it won't be charity at all, and the money that you pay back to me can be used to help other youngsters who are down on their luck in New York. Now, that you have finished eating, will you come with me? Remember that it ain't charity at all, if you are honest enough to repay the loan when you can."

It all seemed like a dream, but the clergyman, who had introduced himself as the Rev. Mr. Ambrose, was so wholly friendly that they could not resist him.

They followed him across town, to one of the big clothing stores.

There both boys were fitted out with better clothing than they had ever had in their lives.

From top to toe, everything was brand-new, stylish, spick-and-span.

"Now, there's only one thing more, for the present," announced the clergyman, when the boys had donned their new attire, and before they left the store. "You'll need

some money for your start. I am going to lend you that money. Make good, careful, thoughtful use of that money, boys! Try honestly to get on your feet in this great and wicked city. Not only get on your feet, but keep there. And now, I will write out, and let you sign, notes for the money spent on you, and the money loaned to you."

In a note-book the clergyman jotted down the amounts owed him.

"Sign, please," requested Mr. Ambrose, passing the notebook and the fountain-pen to Joe.

"But this speaks of fifty dollars cash advanced to me!" cried Joe.

"That's right," came the ready, pleasant answer. "That's the amount I'm going to hand you each."

"But we can't—"

"Oh, yes, you can," the minister broke in, laughingly. "If you're honest boys you can take the money with a clean conscience, for you'll know that, one of these days, you're going to pay every cent back to me. Sign, please, and take the money."

Joe pinched himself, but it hurt, and so he knew he was awake.

With a trembling hand he signed. Frank did the same.

Then in the hands of each was pressed a little wad of crisp, new banknotes.

"Now, remember, boys, at all times—"

Then and there the Rev. Mr. Ambrose launched into a short but very earnest talk on the temptations of a great city. He begged them to look out against these temptations, and to remain at all times honest and sincere.

"Now, that's about all, boys, for the present," he wound up. "Here is my card. Come and see me when you can report that you really have begun to succeed in New York. But don't come to me before you can make that report. Remember—not before."

And then he was gone, rushing away, leaving two utterly-dazed boys behind.

"He must have dropped straight down from the skies," Joe managed to gasp, at last.

"You two boys played in luck to-day," smiled one of the salesmen who had helped to fit them out. "Not many kids find a friend like that."

"He's pretty near a man-angel!" cried Joe, fervently.

Then, suddenly, he jerked Frank away in the direction of the dressing-rooms in which they had put on their new clothes.

"We may be green in the city, Frank, but we know there are a lot of thieves in this town. We don't want to lose a lot of money, and we'll make it safe before we go out of here."

"How?" demanded Holden.

"Take off one of your shoes, put your money in the bottom of it, and then put on your shoe again," Joe whispered. "It'll be a smart pickpocket who can get your money out of your shoe."

Very soon this had been done, Joe leaving out one small bill for expense money.

"And now, how will we start looking for a job?" asked Frank, as they left the busy store behind and joined the crowd on Broadway.

"Oh, we'll buy a newspaper, and stand in a doorway long enough to see who is advertising for help," Joe proposed.

From the newspaper they bought they soon had half a dozen addresses of firms that wanted boys.

They had been in New York long enough to know something about the run of the streets.

By noon they had looked up all six of the advertisers, but found that other boys had been there ahead of them.

So into a restaurant they went, for luncheon, and, while there, they consulted their newspaper again.

A few more addresses were picked out, and once more they started the rounds.

In one place they were told to call again.

That was the most encouragement that they got through the day.

"I've found out one thing, anyway," sighed Joe. "The fellow who wants to catch one of these jobs must be up at daylight, and get around to the fellow who advertises for help by eight o'clock in the morning."

"We can't very well look up any more jobs to-day," sighed Frank, who was tired and very white.

"No, we can't. But we'll be at it early to-morrow."

"Where'll we stop to-night?" Frank asked.

"Not on a dray, thank goodness!" laughed Joe. "Later, we'll look up some of the lodging-places advertised in the paper. We've got to find a cheap place, for we may have to make our money last a good while, old fellow."

"It looks that way," sighed discouraged Frank.

"See here," suggested Joe, looking sympathetically at his worn-out chum, "I think, Frank, you need a little cheering-up more than anything. You want a little talk with some pleasant people."

"Where'll we find such folks?"

"Why, the Downeys, of course," cried Joe, his face glowing. "They are at the St. Denis Hotel. I've inquired where that is. It ain't far from here, and we'll get on a car and ride up there."

"Do you really want to go?" Frank asked, doubtfully.

"Want to? Of course I do! Won't Tess be there? And I feel sorter shabby about the way we ducked out yesterday morning. But it's different, now," Joe went on, happily. "We look decent enough to call on folks. And I think—or hope—they'll be real glad to know that we're in a little better luck."

"We'll go up there, then," Frank agreed.

The poor, worn-out chap, weakling that he was, would have liked much better to look up a lodging and lie down.

But he guessed how anxious Joe was to meet Tess, now that things had taken on a different and better look.

So they rode up Broadway on a street-car until they reached the hotel.

It was a new experience for Joe to write his name on a card at the desk, and send it up to the Downeys by a brass-buttoned bellboy.

But the latter was soon back at the hotel desk, and led them to the elevator.

It was the first ride either had ever taken in an elevator.

"Off third," called the bellboy, and led them down a corridor.

He knocked, and Mrs. Downey pulled open the door.

"Tess," she called, joyously, "here's the boys from home!"

She drew them into the room, while Tess came quickly forward, holding out her hand in welcome.

"Dad's out, but he'll be glad to see you when he comes in," Tess explained. "You'll simply have to stay to-night and take supper with us. We're not going to let you run away like you did yesterday."

Though mother and daughter must have been greatly surprised at the sudden change in the appearance of the boys, neither spoke of it.

"Found a chance for a start in New York yet?" asked Mrs. Downey.

Then Joe blurted out, frankly, with the whole story of the splendid Rev. Mr. Ambrose.

"He must be a very kind man," cried Mrs. Downey, her face glowing.

"Oh, he is—a magnificent man!" Joe responded, enthusiastically.

"And you think you'll be able to find work and get along all right, now?" Tess asked.

"I don't see how we can help it," Joe rejoined. "We can't go on forever without finding work. And we've got good clothes to make an appearance with, and money enough to last us a long time. Oh, yes, we'll get on great, Frank and I!"

"Oh, I do hope so," murmured Mrs. Downey.

The door burst open, and Mr. Downey, looking pale and haggard, and wobbling a good deal in his gait, burst into the room.

He tottered to a chair, and sank into it, catching his breath hard.

"William, what's the matter?" burst from his wife.

"Oh, I've met the greatest scoundrel I ever heard tell of," almost sobbed the farmer, who looked the farmer still, despite his fine clothes.

"What on earth can have happened?" insisted Mrs. Downey, rising and going over to her husband.

"I hate to tell you," shivered Mr. Downey. "But I suppose I've got to. Wife, when I went down into the office of this hotel this morning I ran into a chap. He was slick-looking, and talked slick. He seemed to know me, too, though I couldn't place him."

"Who could he have been?" wondered Mrs. Downey.

"I wish I knew!" muttered the farmer, fiercely. "If I did, I'd find him, and I—I'd kill him!"

"Oh, William, what has happened? Tell me, can't you?"

"Well, it was this way, wife. This slick chap and I got to talking about business, and he seemed to know a heap about good chances in business in New York. Then he

hinted that we might take a little walk, and he'd show me something curious.

"Well, he took me around to a place where some men were betting on the way numbers came out on a wheel the folks had there. My slick man bet a twenty-dollar bill and got back a hundred. Then he put down the hundred, and then it came out six hundred. Then, of course, like a fool, I wanted a try at that wheel."

"Oh, William, did you play in a game of chance?" cried Mrs. Downey, in a horrified voice.

"It wan't no game of chance—there wan't a blamed chance in it for me," replied her husband, shamefacedly. "Wife, I might as well tell you. I lost eight hundred dollars betting on that wheel!"

"William, I hope you'll let that be a lesson to you!" cried his wife, sternly.

"You bet it will," agreed her wretched husband. "And that ain't the worst of it, wife. I was telling what happened to a fresh-looking little snip of a clerk in the hotel office, and he laughed right in my face. He told me that was a regular cheating game that city folks work on us farmers. It's a kind of a game they call BUNCO!"

"William, our eighteen thousand dollars won't last us long in New York, if you go on in this way," remarked his wife, in a worried voice.

"But I won't," cried Farmer Bill Downey, desperately. "No more bunco for me. I've got my eye-teeth cut, I have. But if ever I lay my eyes on that Mr. Slick, I'll——"

"What kind of a looking man was he, papa?" Tess broke in.

Farmer Bill Downey launched into a very particular description of the bunco man.

As the description proceeded, Joe shot a look of misery at his chum.

The description fitted, perfectly, the flashy-looking fellow whom our hero had told all about the Downeys.

CHAPTER VI.

DOWN IN THE DREGS OF NEW YORK.

There was a pained hush for a while.

Joe did not dare to speak of the simple-minded way in which he had told everything to the slick bunco chap.

"William, you've got a lot of money about yet," said his wife, nervously, at last.

"And it's going to stay about me," said her husband, doggedly.

"Why don't you leave it in the hotel safe, the way the notice over on the wall says?"

"If I did, somebody'd rob the safe," groaned the farmer. "No, no; I'm going to keep my money right in the belt around my waist."

"But you've got three thousand dollars there, William."

"It's safer there than anywhere else, wife. No one can get it from me without my seeing him."

"It's about time you spoke to our company," broke in Tess.

"I thought I had," explained Mr. Downey. "But I'm so flustered that I don't know what I'm about. Howdy, boys?"

"Why don't you tell the police what happened to you?" Joe hinted.

"And get laughed at for being a simple farmer?" flared Mr. Downey. "Get my name in the papers, too, and have all the folks at home laughing at me? Not much! Boys, if you ever let out a word of this in Stony Brook, I'll wallop the both of you!"

"They don't intend to, papa," Tess broke in, soothingly. "And it isn't a nice way to talk to the boys who saved my life."

"That's so," admitted the farmer. "'Scuse me, boys."

"They're going to stay and take tea with us to-night," explained Mrs. Downey.

"Let's get down to it now, then," urged the farmer. "It's hot as blazes up in these rooms."

So all hands went down into the restaurant, where the whirring electric fans kept the cool air in circulation.

Joe had a seat beside Tess, which made that supper seem famously good.

"I'm going out and get a cigar," hinted Farmer Downey, when the meal was over. "It's funny, but they allow smoking in this restaurant."

"Come right back, won't you, William?" urged his wife, anxiously.

Her husband turned and glared at her.

"What do you think I am?" he demanded. "A baby?"

"Dad is 'touchy' to-night," sighed Tess.

"Losing all that money is enough to make any man a bit crazy," defended Mrs. Downey.

But the minutes sped by as the four remained at the table.

"Where on earth can that man be?" wondered Mrs. Downey, anxiously. "I do hope he hasn't met any more slick men! Boys, do you mind going to see if you can find him. If you do, bring him upstairs. Daughter, you and I will go up now."

Joe and Frank hurried out into the hotel office, as they had been bidden.

But Mr. Downey was not there, nor was he among the smokers who had taken seats on the chairs outside that warm summer evening.

"We've got to find him," gritted Joe, and hurried to the desk.

"Mr. Downey?" repeated the clerk. "Why, I think I saw him going into the bar-room with a man."

"Another Mr. Slick?" Joe murmured, anxiously, to Frank. "Hurry up!"

They opened the swinging-door of the bar-room and peered in. Then they went further in, but no Mr. Downey could they find there.

"Come on! We'll look all over the blamed hotel," quivered Joe. "We've simply got to find him, Frank. It was all my fault that slick chap knew enough about Mr. Downey to pick up his acquaintance. Oh, I was a big fool all right!"

But I've got to see to it that he don't find any more bunco men."

Their roamings over the ground floor of the hotel brought them, at last, to the ladies' entrance.

They were about to step out to the sidewalk when Joe suddenly pulled his friend back.

"Here's Downey!" quivered our hero.

There, in truth, was Farmer Downey, passing the door at that moment, arm-in-arm with a stranger.

"You're sure you can find that slick bunco feller?" asked Bill Downey.

"Perfectly sure, my dear Mr. Downey, from the description you give of him," replied the stranger. "I know all about him. I've been a detective in New York for twenty years, and I always know how to place my hands on—"

Then the pair drifted on out of hearing.

But Joe turned a startled face to his chum.

"Mr. Slick number two!" gasped our hero.

"Surest thing on earth!" quivered Frank Holden. "Oh, Lordy!"

"Come on, Frank!"

"What are you going to do?" questioned Holden, as the two boys stepped into the street. "Speak to Mr. Downey?"

"Speak to him?" retorted Joe, witheringly. "What good would that do? He's the most pig-headed man on earth. He'd send us about our business."

"Then what?"

"We'll follow him, Frank, and be so close that nothing can happen."

"How can we stop folks cheating him?"

"If we see anything of that sort up we'll butt in in a hurry. Come along."

Farmer Downey and his companion were further down the side street by this time, but the boys still had them in sight.

Nor did the trailing prove to be hard work.

"Going into a saloon!" muttered Joe, scornfully, at last. "That's always been one trouble with Downey. He likes his liquor once in a while."

But they waited, across the street, until they saw Mr. Downey and his companion come out.

From saloon to saloon the chase led.

But the boys hung on until the chase had led them over close to the North River front.

At last Downey and his new "friend" went into one of the cheaper-looking beer gardens.

Joe and Frank took up their watch outside.

"I don't like this," shivered Burton, when at least twenty minutes had gone by. "I'm afraid Mr. Downey is getting buncoed in there. He must be a good bit drunk by this time."

"I wish we could see what's going on in there," muttered Frank Holden, uneasily.

"I mean to see!"

"How?"

"I'm going in there!"

Frank looked a trifle worried. He had been brought up

How long they walked, or where they went they did not know.

But, at last, our hero was called to himself by a sign that he saw on a door-post—"Furnished rooms to let."

It was late, but the landlady answered their summons. The boys engaged a room on the top floor at three dollars a week.

Joe fell dumbly into a chair by the one window of the dingy room.

He felt as if he had died and passed out of the world.

Soon he felt Frank's gentle hand on his shoulder.

"It'll come out all right, Joe, old chum," predicted the weakling.

"Oh, how do you know?" asked Joe, dully. "I tell you, nothing can come right, if the Downeys go on believing that we did that awful thing."

"But they won't believe it."

"Why, old Bill Downey believes it himself! He'll be surer than ever when he wakes up to-morrow. And don't you suppose that Mrs. Downey and Tess will believe it if he sticks to his story?"

"But perhaps he won't stick to it."

"Won't he?" snorted Joe, dismally. "Did you ever know a pig-headed man like him to back down on a story that he'd once sworn to?"

"Have more faith in the right, Joe," pleaded Frank, his voice shaking.

"Frank, old fellow," cried Joe, filled with sudden remorse, "I've been tramping you all over town, and torturing your mind besides, when you're plumb down and out from all-over weariness. I've been a brute to you, Frank, old fellow, when I ought to have been taking care of you. Go to bed, Frank, and sleep. If you will, I'll turn in, too, and give you my word to stop worrying until we've had a good sleep and waked up again."

When they finally did get to sleep that night they slept the sleep of the worn-out.

Joe was the first to awake the next day.

Getting up silently, he tip-toed from the room and went downstairs.

Once in the street, he discovered that it was now early afternoon.

He went into a restaurant, bought some food, had it wrapped up, and returned to the room.

It was an hour later when Frank awoke.

"Here's your breakfast, old fellow," smiled Joe, placing the food on the bed.

"And yours?"

"Oh, I've had mine," Joe lied, weakly.

"What are you going to do to-day, Joe?"

"I'm going to wait until dark, old chap. Then, I'm going out and come as near as I can to finding the part of the town where—that—happened last night. Once I think I've found the section of the town, I'm going to walk the streets on a chance of finding that fellow who lured Bill Downey off last night. And I'll keep it up night after night," wound up Burton, desperatel, "until I find the

scoundrel who has caused all this misery. Job be hanged! The only job I want on earth now is the finding of that rascal. But as for you, Frank——"

"The same job for me!" spoke Holden, very quietly, yet so firmly that our hero knew at once that there would be no use in trying to argue his chum out of his decision.

At a little after dark they stole forth. They started from the side street beside the hotel, though, much to their relief, they did not meet any of the Downeys.

Then, unceasingly, the two boys hunted for the part of the town in which they had been the night before.

Thus three hours passed. Joe, at last, was beginning to feel rather sure that he remembered the street on which they now were as being close to the scene of the crime of the night before.

"Look, Joe!" thrilled Frank, suddenly, tugging at his chum's arm. "Isn't that the fellow now, across the street, and a little further down?"

"Bad luck to him—it is!" throbbed Joe Burton.

The stranger who had lured Bill Downey away was standing at the curb, smoking a cigar and studying the wall opposite.

"Oh, we'll jump on him quick!" vibrated Joe. "We'll make him give up that stolen money, if we have to wring it out of his hide!"

With no uncertain step our hero crossed the street and hurried on along, Frank keeping steadfastly at his side.

The stranger paid no heed to the approaching boys until Joe tapped him heavily on the shoulder.

"Good evening!" voiced Joe, crisply. "What's wrong? The knockout business dull to-night?"

CHAPTER VIII.

ONE BOY AGAINST A CITYFUL!

Slowly and without excitement the stranger turned around.

But that better glimpse of the fellow's face only made Joe the more sure of his man.

"Remember me?" Joe demanded, grimly.

"What did you say the time was, kid?" grinned the wretch.

"Time to give back that stolen money," retorted Joe, with vim. "Ready to do it?"

"What brand of cigarettes do you use?" jeered the stranger, who was taller than either of the boys by a head, and broad of shoulder.

"Don't use cigarettes—or knockout drops, either," Joe snapped, meaningly.

"Oh, I didn't know but you had been dreaming," hinted the fellow, taking two deep puffs at his cigar.

"Just understand something," Joe warned his man. "Either you get ready to hand over the money you stole last night, or we turn you over to the police!"

"That's good," nodded the stranger, drily.

"Do you give up?"

"Give up nothing," came the careless reply, deilvered

without heat. "I don't know what you boys are driving at. But your joke's no good."

"Joke?" raged wrathful Joe.

Then he exploded into instant action.

Like a flash he closed in on the fellow, grappling with him.

"Police!" bellowed Burton. "Police!"

Just in a jiffy, it seemed, while the two were scuffling and Frank was doing his best to help, and the street was full of excited men who poured out of nearby saloons and shops.

Biff! Whump! The next thing that Joe Burton knew he was being held down and thumped for all there was in the game.

Four or five husky brutes took a hand in pounding him, while others struggled for a chance to help.

Then it was over, and the smoke cleared away.

Woefully sore, but otherwise uninjured, Joe Burton got on his feet, facing a crowd of leering ruffians.

"Like sport?" grinned one of the cowards.

But Joe was staring wildly for the knockout-drop man. He was not in sight, now. Neither was Frank Holden. "Where's my friend?" demanded Joe, in swift anxiety. "Didn't see no friend. D'y'e lose one?" sneered a man. There was a prompt, brutal laugh.

Joe ran swiftly to the corner, but Frank Holden was nowhere in sight.

"Frank! Frank!" he called.

But a chorus of laughter was all the answer he got.

For some minutes Joe walked up and down the avenue, staring in at the door of every lighted shop. But no Frank!

Then, as Joe was passing the corner near which the row had occurred, he heard a jeering voice say, in an undertone:

"Oh, the kid tried to ruffle Slick Ike—that's all!"

"Slick Ike!" panted Joe, inwardly. "I'm not likely to forget that name!"

But he realized the uselessness of looking further for Frank.

"He won't be back at the room," quivered Joe. "He didn't slip out—Frank Holden would die before he'd turn tail and scoot away from a friend in trouble. He—"

"Say," murmured a woman's low voice at his side.

"What is it, madam?" queried Joe, turning to find himself staring at a stupid-looking woman.

She might have been forty. Her clothes were cheap and gaudy, her eyes red and bleared.

"I got a tip for ye," leered the woman. "If ye keep quiet, mebbe ye'll see your friend again, one of these days. If ye make a row, he's done for—the friend!"

"What do you mean?" blazed Joe.

"I've given you a straight tip—that's all. Brought you a message," leered the woman.

"You know where my friend is—what happened to him?"

"Mebbe."

Along the sidewalk came a policeman, strolling and swinging his club.

"Officer," spoke Joe, quickly, "get hold of this woman. Don't let her get away!"

"What's the matter?" demanded the cop, coming slowly toward them.

The woman did not shrink, or attempt to get away. On the contrary, she grinned at the officer.

"Officer," urged Joe, swiftly, "I got into a row here. The friend who was with me disappeared. This woman tells me that she knows where the friend is—that he's being held as security for my not making a row over the matter."

"Then you'd better not," hinted the cop, slowly.

"Officer, can't you make this woman tell where my friend is? Can't you help me to rescue my friend?"

"Out of my line and off my beat," rejoined the policeman, carelessly.

"You don't mean to say," gasped Joe, "that you won't make any effort to help me find my friend?"

"What do you take me for? A lost and found column in a newspaper?" demanded the cop.

"But—"

"See here, son, run home and get some sleep," advised the bluecoat.

"But this woman is the accomplice of the rascals who have dragged my chum away. Officer, she's as bad a criminal as any of the men around here."

"Gwan!" scoffed the cop. "She's my sister, and a good girl!"

It was a fearful facer to Joe, who had always believed that policemen are on the side of law and order.

Yet here was this tough-looking woman laughing coarsely, while the officer seemed about to lose his temper.

"But, see here—" Joe began, over again.

"Gwan!" ordered the guardian of the law. "Skiddoo! Twenty-three, kid! Off the beat—or I'll run you in and have you sent to a shop where they keep bug-house folks like you on ice! Are you going?"

"Yes, I'm going," agreed Joe, suddenly, realizing that, if he meant to help his chum, he must keep out of trouble.

But from the lamp-post at the corner he took quick note of the avenue and the street, so that he could find this place again.

Then, without a word, he turned off down the side street.

"What on earth can I do now?" quivered the boy, as he hurried desperately along. Even the police side with the crooks in this fearful city. Has it got to be one boy against a whole cityful of hard-hearted people?"

On another street Joe halted, full of a new purpose.

Looking about, he singled out a passing man who appeared to be respectable.

"Will you kindly direct me to the nearest minister?" begged Joe.

"What church?" asked the man, stopping.

"Any church! Any minister!"

The man directed Joe, civilly enough. Our hero hurried on until he found the parsonage.

It was growing late, but fortunately the Rev. Mr. Stevens was still out of bed.

He received Joe, took him into his study and made the boy sit down.

"I've come to you, a clergyman," began Joe, feverishly, "because I'm a stranger in New York, and I don't know where else to find an honest man that I can depend upon."

"State the case," begged Mr. Stevens, kindly.

"This isn't the kind of matter that I can really help you much in," announced the clergyman, when Joe had finished. "The best advice that I can give you is to go to one of the newspaper offices. See the editor, tell your story to him, and beg him to do something. There is no other force in New York that does as much as the newspapers to keep the police and the courts to their duties."

"What newspaper office?" quivered Joe. "And can I find an editor in as late as this?"

"Oh, you'll find the editors of the morning papers at their offices for two or three hours yet," replied the minister.

He told Joe how to reach Park Row, which office to go to, and how to state his case to an editor.

"I don't know how to thank you," cried Joe, tears in his eyes as he rose. "But I didn't know where to go, and felt that I would be safer in asking a minister than any one else."

"Success to you, my young friend," replied the Rev. Mr. Stevens, gripping the boy's hand at parting.

Like one in a fever Joe journeyed downtown, found the Morning Chronicle office and stated his errand to the office-boy who acted as outer sentinel to the editors' offices.

Some ten minutes later Joe found himself in the city editor's room, talking to a Mr. Southey.

Southey listened, almost impatiently, as if he felt very little inclined to believe the yarn.

Then, at length, the city editor rose, opened a door and called out:

"Easton!"

Then into the room hurried a quick, wiry-looking, fresh-faced young reporter.

Bert Easton did not appear to be a day more than eighteen.

"Easton," directed Mr. Southey, without enthusiasm, "take this young man out to your desk and hear what he has to say. The story sounds like one of the kind you like to fool with. See if there's anything in it."

"Step this way, please," and Easton led the country boy out into a long room where several men sat writing at desks.

Easton placed a chair for our hero, and took another for himself.

"Now, spin the story," directed the young reporter. "Talk low, so as not to disturb the fellows who are busy."

Joe got as far as the name, "Slick Ike," when Reporter

Easton jumped up, passing into another room, but soon coming back with a huge scrap-book.

"Look at the pictures as I turn the pages," asked the young newspaper man. "If you see a face that looks like your man's, then show it to me."

He turned the pages slowly, but suddenly Joe plumped his finger down on the photograph print of a face.

"That's the rascal!" cried Joe.

"And that's Slick Ike, too," nodded Easton, pleasantly.

"So, so far, Burton, your story appears to be straight."

"Oh, you'll believe me, won't you?" begged Joe. "And you'll help me out in this fearful matter."

"Well, I'll see what is to be done," Easton promised, smilingly.

"Will you get started to-night—right away?" quavered the country boy.

"Sure thing. We'll look up Slick Ike, and we'll look up that cop."

"You're not afraid of the policeman being ugly?" Joe asked, curiously.

Easton stared at his questioner in plain surprise.

"Me? Afraid of a policeman?" laughed the fresh-faced young reporter. "What a jolly lot you've got to learn, Burton!"

"Why?"

"Why? Why, because, when a reporter goes up against a policeman, it's always the policeman who gets nervous! Come along, now, and we'll see what the policeman has to say for himself!"

Backed by such a fearless ally as this, Joe Burton felt as if he could face the whole world!

CHAPTER IX.

THE POWER OF THE PRESS.

Reporter Easton led the way at a swinging stride across town to the Sixth Avenue Elevated Railway.

"This will whirl us uptown in no time," he remarked, pleasantly.

"We can't get there too soon," quivered Joe. "Poor Frank! What on earth can have happened to him?"

"I'm thinking we'll know soon," smiled the reporter.

"If the police can only be made to help us."

"Oh, you'll find that the police will jump, in a case of this kind, when they get their orders from a newspaper. I've been on many a case like this, and haven't had any failures so far."

There was comfort in hearing this kind of talk.

Reporter Bert Easton, young as he was, seemed so confident, and to have such a masterful air, that Joe Burton forgot to fidget on his way uptown.

"We'll be just about in time to find the squads changing," murmured Easton, as they left the train.

"The squads? Changing?"

"Yes; the police squads. The night's police duty is divided up between two platoons in each police precinct.

to believe that a saloon was the last place one should think of going into. But circumstances sometimes alter cases.

Joe led the way resolutely across the street, pushed open the swinging-door of the place, and entered.

Farmer Downey was not there.

But from down the corridor at the rear of the saloon came the sounds of many voices.

Waiters were going from the bar to that corridor, carrying trays laden with drinks.

"We'll find out what's going on down there," whispered Joe, darting ahead.

"Here, boys, get out of here!" hailed a gruff voice from behind the bar.

But Joe darted steadfastly ahead into the corridor.

Here he found half a dozen little drinking-booths, with parties in each.

"Here, you get out of here!" ordered a waiter, gripping Joe by the arm.

"You go out and try a two-mile run," retorted Joe. "I'm looking for a friend of mine—and here he is!"

There, indeed, was Farmer Bill Downey, seated at a table in one of the booths. With him was the "detective" and another man.

"Mr. Downey!" cried Joe, desperately, breaking into the booth, as he shook himself free of the waiter.

Mr. Downey looked up from his glass, nodding sleepily. "Mr. Downey, it's time to go home," urged Joe, shaking the farmer by the shoulder.

"Why, hul-lo—boys," responded the farmer, drowsily.

"Friends of yours, these boys?" asked the "detective."

"Yesh; know 'em—well," replied Downey, in a thick voice.

"You boys have no business in a place like this," spoke the "detective," sharply.

"Then neither has Mr. Downey," flashed back Joe. "We want to take him home with us."

"Won' go—home! I——"

That was the end of Bill Downey's speech. One of his fists came down limply on the table. His head fell forward, and he snored.

"See here, this may become serious," cried the "detective," jumping up. "Boys, you don't want to see your friend arrested and disgraced, do you?"

"You bet we don't," retorted Joe.

"Then slip out through that sidedoor a second and see if you see any policeman coming. This is the time of the night when they go around arresting the men who are intoxicated. If you don't see the police, come back and tell us, and we'll get your friend into a cab while there's time. I don't want to see this poor old fellow arrested and sent to jail. Scoot and watch!"

A waiter held open the sidedoor that led to a street.

Joe and Frank, filled with alarm, hurried out, looking up and down the street.

Bang! The door closed. Joe sprang back to push it open, but it refused to yield.

"The front door again—quick as blazes, Frank!" panted our hero.

"Here, you boys get out of here—mosey!" ordered a waiter, placing himself in their way.

"Don't you think we'll do it," quivered Joe, his eyes flashing. "There's a friend of ours in trouble in there, and we're going to get in there to him."

"Get out, I tell you, or you'll get thrown out!"

"Then we'll bring back the police!" defied Joe. "Which shall it be?"

"Let 'em go in to their friend, Slim," called a voice from further down the saloon.

With the coast clear before them, the boys raced back into that booth.

Farmer Bill Downey was alone, now. He still lay with his head on the table, snoring.

As if by magic the sidedoor open, and a cab drew up at the curb.

"Better get your friend home before the police find him and pinch him," advised a waiter.

Other employees of the place came forward to help.

Farmer Downey was gotten swiftly into the cab, the boys with him.

"Gracious! What'll Mrs. Downey say?" quivered Joe, as the vehicle rolled hotelward.

When two hotel porters, carrying the limp body of Farmer Downey, reached that room on the third floor, Mrs. Downey seemed likely to faint.

But she rallied, and sent for the hotel physician.

"Drugged," said the medical man as soon as he looked at Downey. "He has been drinking, and got knockout drops served in his drink. Did your husband have any money or valuables with him, madam?"

"A lot of money in a belt around his waist," sobbed Mrs. Downey.

"Then we'd better look for that belt, quick!" hinted the doctor.

Frightened Tess and the boys stepped out into the hallway, but Mrs. Downey soon opened the door to them.

"The belt and the money are gone," she sobbed.

"Gone, in the minute we were away from him?" echoed horrified Joe.

"A minute's long enough for slick chaps to do the job," nodded the doctor. "Could you find that saloon again where this happened, boys?"

"I'm blessed if I could!" quivered Joe.

"Then, madam," announced the physician, turning to Mrs. Downey, "you may as well look upon the money as gone for good!"

"But my husband will get better again?" asked Mrs. Downey, trembling.

"Oh, he'll come out of this all right," replied the doctor, in a tone that meant that it mattered very little whether Farmer Bill Downey ever drew breath again.

Bye and bye the boys rose to leave, but Mrs. Downey begged them to remain with her in her trouble.

Nothing loath, Joe sat down again, Frank following his lead.

For some hours the doctor waited and worked, the others sitting miserably by.

Then, at last, the farmer opened his eyes.

"Do you remember things?" asked the doctor.

Downey mumbled a confused account of his night's adventure. By degrees his mind became clearer.

"William," asked his wife at last, "do you realize that you've been robbed of that belt and the three thousand dollars?"

"Robbed?" shrieked her husband, sitting up in bed. "Robbed? What's that you say?"

Then his wild, roving glance fell upon the boys.

"They were with me!" he cried, frantically. "Yes, they were with me. This is their work. They helped to rob me! It's their work, I tell you—all the work of the same rascally No-Good Boys!"

CHAPTER VII.

A TOUGHER NAME THAN EVER!

"Joe Burton, you surely didn't do this wicked work?" cried Mrs. Downey, turning, aghast, to our hero. "Did you, Frank Holden?"

"No, ma'am, we didn't," Joe protested quickly, horror ringing in his voice.

"Yes, they did, the rascals!" angrily asserted Bill Downey, struggling to get out of the bed.

But the doctor and his wife held him back, and the farmer's head ached so savagely that he didn't feel like struggling.

Then, while Joe and Frank looked on, with lips parted in amazement and terror, Bill Downey gave a lurid account of the night's doings.

Fact and imagination were strangely blended in that jerkily-told tale.

But he was positive that the boys had been with the thieves who had plundered him.

He told, positively, of the boys having been present while his drink was being drugged.

"And I remember their helping that stranger to find the belt and get it away from me," roared the victim of knock-out drops. "It was they who told those folks that I had money on me. They knew about it, and no one else did! Mistaken? Nothing of the sort, I tell you!"

"Listen to what really happened," pleaded Joe, turning his eyes, filled with misery, upon Tess and her mother.

Then our hero gave a truthful account of what had happened, with all of their following of Downey and the stranger.

In every particular Frank Holden backed the narrative up, but all to no purpose.

"Don't I know?" half-sobbed Bill Downey. "They helped rob me, I tell you! It was all their doings. They're a bad lot, these boys, anyway. Folks at home called 'em the No-Good Boys, and they always deserved the name. They're

thieves, and always have been! Search 'em, and you'll find the money about 'em."

"No, you wouldn't," disputed the doctor, with a grim smile. "If these boys were really in it, they'd be too slick to bring any of the plunder here. But, madam, shall I turn these boys over to the police?"

Joe started, turning deathly pale, and feeling as if his body were freezing.

Arrested, and for helping rob Tess's father!

Death would be far better than that.

"Yes; hand 'em over to the police!" screamed Downey. "They're thieves—no-good thieves!"

"You be still," ordered the doctor, "or I'll have you taken off to a hospital, where they'll make you keep quiet. Leave this to your wife, sir, who isn't as big a fool as you've been."

"Arrest 'em!" insisted the farmer, huskily.

"Madame, what do you say?" asked the doctor, quietly.

"I—I can't say do a thing like that," replied the woman, slowly and brokenly. "They—they saved my little girl's life the other day. They——"

"Mrs. Downey," gasped Joe, trembling and reeling almost from heart-sickness, "you don't mean to say that you believe anything as awful as this?"

"I—I—oh, I don't know what to say or think!" wailed the poor woman.

"Say—say that you don't believe this fearful charge, anyway!"

"I don't know what to say!"

Faint with despair, Joe Burton turned to Tess.

But that young woman drew herself up stiffly. Her eyes were flashing with a look that made Joe's brain fairly wobble.

"Tess, say just one word that's friendly!" begged Joe.

"How can I?" she asked, in a voice that sounded miles away. "My father is no liar!"

"No, but his brain's twisted with the stuff that set his head crazy," urged Joe, heart-brokenly. "Tess, just one friendly word, or the world will seem standing on its head!"

"The only word I can find to say," responded Tess, stiffly, "is—good-night!"

"Yes, you'd better go," hinted the doctor.

Joe turned once more piteously to Mrs. Downey.

"Arrest 'em—the No-Good Boys!" bellowed Mr. Downey.

"Go," said the doctor. "Go, now, before this crazy man arouses the hotel."

No one said "stay."

Joe looked at Frank, mutely. Then both turned to the door.

His hand on the knob, from the corridor, Joe spoke these words, softly:

"Some day—soon—I hope you'll know that this isn't true."

Out into the hot, sultry summer night they plunged.

Joe walked blindly on, Frank Holden seeming struck dumb.

We'll find the second platoon going out and the first platoon coming in."

"You're going to the police station, then?"

"That's the station just ahead, with the green lantern out."

At this moment, a long line of policemen, in double file, came marching down the station-house steps.

"There goes the second platoon now," explained Easton. "In about ten minutes the second platoon will be in."

Reporter Easton turned in up the station-house steps, Joe keeping at his side.

From the corridor they turned into the office.

There was a railing across half the room, and, behind this railing, a great desk at which a man in uniform sat writing.

Two other men, in citizen's dress, lounged about. Though Joe did not know it, these were "plain-clothes men"—minor detectives.

"Good evening, Sarge," hailed the young reporter.

"Oh, hullo, Easton," greeted the sergeant behind the desk. "Anything up?"

"Not a heap," replied the reporter. "Just dropped in."

Joe, burning with anxiety to be at work on the trail of Frank Holden, gasped at this leisurely way of going at the case.

But Easton gave him a quiet look, which meant:

"Keep cool."

For a few minutes the young reporter hung around, outside the rail.

At length he opened his mouth to ask, carelessly:

"Who's on eighteen to-night, Sarge?"

"First or second platoon?" queried the sergeant.

"First."

"Gimp."

"Oho," mused the reporter, as if it were a matter of small importance.

"Nothing much doing to-night is there, Sarge?" asked the reporter, after a pause.

"Nothing but what your paper's regular man got here an hour ago."

"Well, so long."

Nodding, also, to the plain-clothes men, Easton strolled slowly out of the station, followed by Joe, whose blood burned for swift action.

"Can't we do something, quick?" begged Joe, in a whisper as they strolled down the street.

"Oh, we're getting along fast enough," Easton assured him.

"I wish I could take your cool view of it," broke, impulsively, from the country boy's lips.

"And you could, if you knew the police and the town as well as I do," smiled the young reporter. "Nothing to be gained by making a lot of steam before the police. Your trouble to-night happened on beat eighteen, and Gimp was the cop. He'll be coming along this way in a minute or two. Slide into that doorway, and wait. Keep back in the dark as much as you can."

Joe followed orders. Easton took up his stand on the curb a little further down the street.

Three or four incoming policemen passed. Easton nodded to them in a friendly way.

Then Joe's heart gave a great bound, as, looking out from the doorway, he saw approaching the officer who had threatened to "run him in."

"Hullo, there, Gimp," hailed the young reporter.

"Hullo! That you, Easton?" hailed the dreaded cop, in the most friendly way.

"Yes; I've been waiting to see you, Gimp."

"What's wrong?"

"Well, there was a young fellow disappeared on your beat to-night."

"Haven't heard anything about it," replied the officer, coolly.

"His friend was looking hard for him," narrated Easton, "and the officer on the beat ordered the friend to skiddoo or suffer."

"Meaning me?" demanded the policeman, coloring.

"Meaning you, or some officer on eighteen," Easton went on in a low tone.

"What's in this?" asked Gimp, suddenly.

"Why, the office got hold of it, and scents a story," Easton went on, calmly. "I'm sent out to see what's in it all."

"You can take it from me that there's nothing in it," said Gimp, quickly.

"That's all right," nodded Easton. "But the trouble is that report won't go at the office."

"What do you mean? Do you doubt my word?"

"That's not what I'm talking about, Gimp, old man," Easton replied, familiarly. "But there are things back of this whole story that the office, for reasons of its own, means to sift to the bottom."

"You mean your paper's going to make trouble for me?" flared the policeman, sullenly.

"Why, no, that isn't the game. The office doesn't care a hang about you, Gimp, one way or the other. But the office tells me that the missing boy has simply got to be found."

"Then if there's a kid lost," grunted the policeman, "I suppose there's no objection to your snooping around and finding him."

"I'm afraid you haven't got this quite right yet, old man," rejoined Easton, resting one hand on the policeman's shoulder in a friendly way. "I'll hit out plain from the shoulder now, Gimp, old boy. We have it dead straight that a boy did disappear to-night, and that you ordered another boy off the beat."

"Well?"

"Now, behind this simple little affair, Gimp, there's another and bigger affair that the office has me working on. A prominent man from the country was done out of three thousand plunks by the use of Pete, and Slick Ike was the performer. Now, do you savvey?"

"Pete" is the slang name given by criminals to knock-out drops.

"I don't savvey," protested the policeman, looking at Easton harder than ever.

"Then I'll give you a couple of slices more off the story," continued the reporter, coolly. "The disappearance of the boy to-night, and the rough usage of the other look as if both were due to a friendly feeling for Slick Ike and his crowd. Now, there are more reporters than myself out on this story," lied the young reporter, calmly. "Gimp, I'm afraid, if you don't cough right up and act honest with me, I'm really afraid that the Chronicle will have a story to show that Slick Ike is paying for the protection of the police, and that Patrolman Gimp will get so badly twisted up in the yarn that he'll be called down to Police Headquarters and broke off the force. There! Is that enough?"

"That's a stiff dose," complained the policeman, "to get from a reporter I always thought was friendly."

"I can be friendly still, most likely, if you'll help me to straighten out this particular mess. But the Chronicle is determined either to have this matter straightened out in a jiffy, or else to go to the bottom, no matter how many cops get broke."

The officer studied the curbstone in silence for a few moments.

"Gracious! Ain't he meek now?" quivered Joe, inwardly, as he watched from the doorway.

"Burton," called the reporter. "Come here."

Joe walked out and quickly up to the pair. As he approached, Policeman Gimp looked up. Joe's eyes met a swift flash of hate.

"Remember the kid, don't you?" pressed Easton, who was almost as much of a kid as Burton.

"Yes," nodded Gimp, gruffly.

"Come, now, we're getting along faster," cried the reporter. "Now, who was the woman that gave this boy the message about his friend?"

"I never saw her before," lied Gimp.

"Never mind that," urged Easton. "What's her name, anyway?"

Finding that the reporter was not to be evaded, Gimp answered, sullenly:

"Red Moll Langan."

"Where does she hang out?"

"At Bender's."

"That's all right. Now, where'll we find Ike to-night?"

"Maybe at Bender's, too."

"Then, see here, Gimp, you go into the station and get into your plain clothes. We'll wait out here. Don't keep us too long."

"I'll be out in ten minutes," promised the cop, shuffling off.

To our hero Bert Easton turned with a smile.

"That, Burton, is what you hear spoken of as 'the power of the press.' That cop hasn't become tame because he wants to, but because I write for a newspaper. I can print a yarn in the Chronicle that will result in Gimp being

called down to Police Headquarters. They'd have to break him off the force if the Chronicle made a big enough howl. Gimp knows it, and knows he can't kick over the traces to-night. Therefore, he's tame."

"Oh, he's tame enough," Joe agreed, joyously. "He doesn't look or act anything like the same cop that abused me."

"He's so tame he'll eat out of your hand now," laughed Easton.

The policeman soon returned.

"Now, I hope you understand, Easton," began Gimp, anxiously, "that I want to do the fair and right thing."

"I'm sure of that," lied Easton, cheerfully. "Now, let's go down to Bender's."

That resort proved to be a saloon with several private rooms in back. The street-door was locked, but a signal-knock at a side-door procured entrance for the trio.

The private rooms led off a larger back room. There were no patrons in the place at this moment.

"Ike been here?" Gimp asked of a waiter who came in.

"Yep; left about an hour ago."

"Coming back?"

"Dunno."

"We'll go on, then, to other places," hinted Easton. "But, say, can't the boy stay here—safely, I mean?"

"You stay here," Gimp directed Joe. "If Ike comes in, you tell him I'm looking for him and to stay here until I get back. Savvey?"

"That's right," Easton added, nodding.

"If he tries to lick me—or worse?" demanded Joe.

"He won't," Gimp replied, confidently, "if you tell him that Gimp wants to see him here, and that he's to wait."

Then the policeman and the reporter went out together.

"Have something to drink?" asked the waiter.

"I don't drink," Joe replied, promptly, but dispiritedly.

"Oh, it won't cost you anything, if you want a nip," the waiter assured him. "It'll be on Gimp, you see."

"I don't want anything to drink," Joe rejoined.

Thereupon the waiter strolled out, leaving Joe alone with his own thoughts.

Ten minutes passed, and then our hero heard the signal-knock at the side door.

"Gent in there waiting to see you," Joe heard the waiter announce.

The swinging-door pushed open.

Joe sprang to his feet, for he found himself facing Slick Ike.

The latter did not appear startled, but merely angry.

"What are you doing here?" demanded the rascal.

"I'm waiting for you."

"Me?" leered Ike. "Thought you'd seen enough of me for one night."

"I guess you'll listen to me now, though," Burton proclaimed, confidently.

"Yes."

"There are others who want to see you."

"Who?"

"Gimp, for one."

"Meaning the cop?" scowled Slick Ike.

"Yes; Officer Gimp."

"Oh, I don't mind seeing him," jeered Ike. "Gimp and me are good friends."

"So I understand," sneered Joe. "Officer Gimp told me that, if you came in here, I was to tell you to wait here until he comes back. He's looking for you."

"Well, he'll find me if he gets back quick enough," snorted Ike, carelessly.

"And there's some one else with him who wants to see you," Joe taunted.

"Some one else?"

"Yes; a reporter."

Ike glared at the boy.

"What kind of a josh are you trying to fill me up with now, kid?"

"Oh, it's straight enough, as you'll see," smiled the boy, confidently. "In fact, I guess you'll come down a bit. Among other things, you'll see to it that my friend is set free—wherever you've got him. A newspaper can let a lot of light into your business, Mr. Ike!"

"See here, younker, is it straight that you've brought the reporters down on me?" glared Ike, taking a step closer.

"Yes, as you'll find out!"

"Then Gimp and every one else be hanged!" bellowed Ike. "I'm going to finish you, if it's the last stop before going to the electric chair!"

He leaped upon Joe, bearing him to the floor.

Our hero tried to shout for help, but Slick Ike, with a fearful clutch at his throat, choked Joe Burton until the latter knew no more.

CHAPTER X.

THANKS—FOR WHAT?

Slick Ike paused in his work, a moment, and saw that Joe Burton had been choked into insensibility.

"But I'll make sure of him!" growled the knockout man. "The little wharf-rat—bringing the newspapers down on me and my business!"

He pried up one of Joe's eyelids, watching the eyeball.

"Thirty seconds more will do for him," uttered the fellow, grimly. "I don't care what happens—after that!"

"Ike, you scoundrel, what does this mean?" demanded an ugly voice from behind.

Policeman Gimp, having returned, was just in time to be startled nearly out of his senses.

As Ike turned to look at him, Gimp sprang forward without more words.

"If you've done for that kid, Ike, I'll send you up for it," panted the cop.

"Don't care if you do," growled Ike.

"Get up off him."

"Won't!"

Policeman Gimp seized the knockout man in a strong grip.

The two men locked, swaying back and forth over the floor.

"Give up, Ike, or I'll use the gun!" warned the policeman, hurling the fellow from him.

Ike stood glaring at Gimp.

"Sit down in that chair, you fool, and behave yourself," ordered the policeman.

Now that his tempest of wrath was cooling, the scoundrel sank limply into the chair indicated.

Gimp stepped quickly to a button, pressing.

"Hustle in some water and get that boy around," ordered the policeman.

As if such jobs were quite usual, the waiter hurried out, came back with water, and then went coolly to work to bring Joe to.

"Guess you didn't throw a big fit that time," grinned Gimp, as Joe opened his eyes. "Here, I'll help you up to a chair. Sit there, while I talk your business for you."

The waiter, at a signal, went out.

While Joe, feeling tenderly at his throat, sat at one side of the room, the policeman and the knockout man talked in low tones across the room.

"I tell you, it's got to be done," Joe heard the officer say, with great earnestness.

"Give it all up?"

"Yep; and turn that other kid loose, too."

"I'd about as soon do time."

"See here, you'll have to get in line," Gimp retorted, impatiently. "If you don't, I won't be on the force much longer, and the Chronicle will hound you behind the bars. You know what a newspaper chase means!"

"All on account of that Burton kid!" snarled Ike.

"No matter! You've got to cough this time, Ike. I'm your friend, and I wouldn't say so if it wasn't straight."

"I can't do it to-night, Gimp."

"You've got to, Ike. It won't rest a minute. Do it now. Come on, I'll go with you."

After more whispered talk, the two men rose.

"You stay here, kid, and you'll be safe this time," Gimp promised. "I'll be back soon, and I'll tell the waiter to see that you ain't used wrong."

"Have they gone after Frank?" Joe wondered.

He longed to run after Gimp and ask him, but he did not feel as sure of the policeman, now that Easton was not here.

"Where is Easton, anyway?" our hero wondered.

Twenty minutes went by.

Then Policeman Gimp came in alone.

"I've got the goods," said the officer, coolly.

"The—the goods?" faltered Joe.

"Well, the long green."

"The—Do you mean the money that was stolen from Mr. Downey?"

"Yes, I've got Downey's plunks," the policeman answered, coolly.

"But where's Frank?"

"Meaning your friend?"

"Yes, yes! Where's Frank Holden?" breathed Joe, earnestly.

"One thing at a time, you know, kid."

"But he must be found," Joe insisted.

"And he will be," Gimp promised. "But, you see, kid, your pal wasn't rushed by Ike's order. Ike don't know what became of him, but he's searching the district. Ike'll have word of your friend, all right, by morning."

"Morning?" groaned Joe.

"Oh, yep; and that'll be rushing things," the officer assured the boy. "Say, see this?"

From an inside pocket Gimp drew out and displayed the top of a compact heap of banknotes.

"Downey's cash," nodded Gimp.

"Going to turn it over to me?" throbbed Joe.

"Say, what do you think I am—easy?" sneered Gimp. "What would you do with the plunks?"

"I'd take the money to Mr. Downey as quick as I could."

"How do I know that?"

"Do you think I'd steal the money—from friends?" blazed Joe.

"Don't know," grinned the policeman. "Ain't taking no chances. I take this money to Downey myself. See?"

"You'll let me go with you?"

"Sure enough. And we'll go now. I don't s'pose your friend'll kick at being waked up to get this money back."

"He'll be tickled to death," Joe promised.

"Then we'll start across town."

"But where's Mr. Easton?"

"Oh, him? He's gone back to his office. Easton knows I'll do the right thing and I'm to telephone him. So he'll have his story for his newspaper."

"I must see him and thank him for his great kindness," quivered Joe Burton.

"Oh, to-morrow'll do for that," hinted the policeman, with a queer grin. "Come on, now."

Puffing steadily at a strong cigar, Officer Gimp did not seem to be displeased with himself as he walked across town.

They struck Broadway, and went down for a few blocks before coming to the St. Denis Hotel.

"You better send up your card with the news?" suggested the officer, as they approached the hotel desk.

So Joe, snatching up a card, wrote across the face:

"Mr. Downey, can you see me at once? I am bringing back the three thousand dollars!"

To this great message Burton signed his name with a happy flourish.

The bellboy was soon back.

"Mr. Downey will see you at once," was the word.

They followed the bellboy to the door.

At the tap, Bill Downey jerked the door open.

"What's this about the money?" faltered the farmer, eagerly.

"I've got it," Joe announced, triumphantly.

"Come in," came the glad summons.

As Joe and the policeman entered the room they caught

sight of Mrs. Downey, in a hastily-donned wrapper. Her husband was attired in shirt, trousers and slippers.

"This is Mr. Downey," Joe said, turning to the policeman.

"You lost some money on the knockout game the other night?" asked the policeman, displaying his badge.

"Yes, yes!"

"How much?"

"Three thousand dollars."

"Count it," went on the policeman, drily, as he handed over the package of money.

Downey took the money in trembling hands, flew to the nearest table and sat down.

Eagerly he counted it through—twice.

"It's right—all here!" thrilled the farmer, leaping to his feet, but holding on to the money with both tight hands.

"Oh, William!" cried his wife. "How thankful you ought to be!"

Joe took an eager step forward.

"Mr. Downey," he cried, "you accused me of being in league with the thieves. Yet I've succeeded in getting your money back to you. Do you take back your charge now? Do you apologize?"

Bill Downey choked hard for an instant. He gulped, trying hard to speak.

Then over Joe's shoulder the farmer caught an evil wink from the policeman.

That wink made up Bill Downey's mind for him.

"I don't take back anything," roared the old man.

Joe started back in sheer dismay.

At that moment the door opened to admit Tess, but Joe did not heed her.

"What do you mean, Mr. Downey?" the boy quavered. "Haven't I succeeded in getting your money back to you?"

Again the farmer caught the policeman's meaning wink.

"Yes, the money's here," snorted the farmer. "But why? You knew, Joe Burton, that I'd have you arrested. So you've made your crowd give up the money. But you did it because you were scared, Joe Burton, and not because you're honest!"

"Oh, oh, oh!" cried Joe, in three different tones of distress.

Then he wheeled upon Tess, whom he heard catch her breath behind him.

"Tess," he appealed, "you don't believe this?"

"I—I don't know what to think," stammered the girl, looking away from him.

"Mrs. Downey, you—" began Joe, desperately.

"It's more'n I can figure out," cried the woman.

Joe wheeled, last of all, upon Gimp.

"Then, officer, will you tell these folks just how it all happened?"

"Why, I don't know much about it," replied Gimp. "All I know is that the money was handed to me by a stranger who said it belonged to this gentleman here."

Joe felt doubly staggered, now, in all this mesh of falsehood and disbelief.

"You—you know I wasn't in with the thieves!" the boy blurted, indignantly.

"As to that I can't just say," replied the policeman, coolly.

"Joe Burton, now I've got my money back, I ain't going to have you arrested," broke in Bill Downey, wrathfully, "but I don't want to see any more of you around me and my family. Get out! Scoot!"

"Not until you've done me some justice in this matter!" defied Joe.

"Officer," demanded the farmer, "will you put this no-good rascal out of the room for me?"

"Come," urged the policeman, taking Joe's arm, "you'll have to get out if these people don't want you here."

He forced Joe roughly into the hallway, then bent to whisper:

"Kid, don't you savvey? You've got to let me do some explaining alone, and then I'll make it straight for both of us. Leave it to me. I know how to handle it. You wait downstairs in the office for me."

"But you make 'em understand that I didn't have any part in this with the thieves," begged Burton.

"That'll be all right. You go down and wait for me." Utterly crestfallen, Joe went.

It had all been so strangely different from what he had expected!

He had looked for the Downeys to be overjoyed, and filled with gratitude toward him.

Even in the face of Bill Downey's distrust, he had expected that Mrs. Downey and Tess—Tess, above all—would be on his side.

"After what we've done for 'em, this is the thanks we get!" Joe quivered as he went down the stairs rather than wait for the elevator. "I had every right to expect the greatest, warmest thanks, and what do I get? Told to get out before I'm kicked out! Is the world always as full of gratitude as this? And Frank—poor, dear old Frank! What is he suffering this night?"

Down in the hotel office Joe paced excitedly up and down the tiled floor.

It was fifteen minutes, by the great clock, before Policeman Gimp came down.

"Did you make them understand?" Joe demanded, eagerly, darting forward.

"I did my best," answered the cop.

"What did they say?"

"Say? Oh, see here, kid, I'd advise you to wait a day or two, and then see 'em. They'll have time to cool off by then."

Had Gimp told the boy that, instead of trying to make them see the truth, he had confirmed the suspicion that Joe and Frank were in league with the knockout gang, our hero would have been frantic.

"Now, wait here a minute," directed the cop. "I've got to get Easton on the telephone, and tell him the money is back safe."

The first thing that Gimp did, though, once he was in

the telephone closet, was to take out and look smilingly at the little roll of bills that he had received from Bill Downey as a slight reward for his "honesty."

Gimp came out, at last.

"I'm pretty sleepy," yawned the policeman. "But we'll see if we can get a line on your friend now."

Joe's heart gave a great, pounding thump. Frank Holden was the one person in the world who believed in him.

"Are we going to find Frank easily?" he begged.

"Sure!" nodded Gimp. "Ought not to take us long, either!"

Joe's pulses bounded. He had no warning whatever of what was in store for him!

CHAPTER XI.

DOWN AND OUT!

Gimp was not inclined to be talkative as the pair strode on across the town once more.

Away over on the West Side the officer tramped for some distance up one of the avenues.

Then, stopping before a doorway, he led the way up to the second flight in a building.

Joe asked no questions.

Gimp knocked on a door that was quickly opened by a red-headed man in dirty shirt-sleeves.

"In with you," ordered Gimp, briefly.

Joe trod along a hallway, with the policeman at his heels.

The red-headed man opened another door, ushering them into a room that was wholly unfurnished save for a few chairs.

There were seven or eight men sitting in here.

Though Joe, intent only on finding Frank, did not take the trouble to guess it, this was a meeting-place for the rougher grade of night-hawks who prey upon the strangers in a great city.

Just as our hero crossed the threshold, the policeman gave him a shove that sent him staggering into the room and sprawling to the floor.

"Jump him! Bounce him!" ordered Gimp, grimly.

Like a human hurricane the gang pounced upon the boy.

He was yanked to his feet, sent spinning, pounded, mauled, hammered.

Breathless, but gritty, Burton did his best to hammer back.

Smash! His fist landed upon one red nose, breaking it and sending a ruffian to the floor.

But it was useless—far worse than useless.

Down to the floor went Joe. He was kicked and stepped on, punched and prodded.

Rip! His coat was torn almost in shreds.

Tear! His trousers would never look like new again.

"Haw! haw! haw!" roared Policeman Gimp, leaning against a wall and holding his sides while he laughed.

"But better quit now, boys. You've done enough."

Quite enough, if Joe Burton's aching bones were to be taken as any indication!

As the gang fell back, Joe struggled painfully to his feet.

"This is your fault!" he cried, hotly, to Gimp.

"Guilty!" the policeman retorted, mockingly.

"Wait until I see Mr. Easton!"

"Wait until you do!" jeered Gimp, with a meaning that missed Joe Burton.

"You promised to take me to my friend."

"You'll see him in the morning," promised Gimp, with a wicked leer. "Come on, now!"

"Know any more places like this to take me to?" Joe demanded, sarcastically, as the officer grabbed his arm.

"Not just like this. It's the station-house now."

"The station-house?" gasped the boy, paling in a twinkling, for he began to get a hint of worse mischief.

"Sure, it's the station now," retorted the cop. "And, if I need any witnesses as to your bad habits, these GENTLEMEN will be glad to act as witnesses, won't you, boys?"

"Sure thing!" came back the bellow of assurance.

"Come on out, now," ordered Gimp, roughly, dragging the boy alone. "Hang back, and I'll use the small club on you!"

Dazed, and thoroughly frightened now, Joe went along without resistance.

Just as Gimp had promised, they went to the station-house.

"What you got the boy for?" demanded the sergeant, looking up curiously as Gimp arraigned his prisoner before the desk.

"Oh, a regular little tramp," replied Gimp. "Hanging out with a Pete gang."

"Got any evidence?" queried the sergeant.

"Lots!" retorted Gimp, drily.

"Can I say a word, sergeant?" quivered Joe.

"Yes; answer the questions I'm going to ask you," came the gruff reply.

Joe replied as to his name, age, where he came from, etc., all of which replies the sergeant noted on the book.

"Take him down to 24," nodded the sergeant, without looking up.

"Sergeant," implored Burton, "won't you hear just a few words from me before I'm locked up?"

"Save your talk for the judge in the morning," came the gruff reply.

"Don't you remember that I was in here with Easton, the reporter?"

"What has that got to do with it?" queried the sergeant. "Take him down, Gimp."

This the policeman did with a good will, dragging Joe roughly below and turning him over to a house officer.

Bang! The cell door closed on the No-Good Boy.

"Is this all the good I've done for myself—and Frank?" he wondered, his head throbbing with pain. "And Easton? Why, that fellow fairly deserted me to these brutes!"

It was a far greater puzzle than the poor lad could hope to make out.

He ached so, from his beating, that he simply must have some rest.

Brushing off one of the benches as best he could, he lay down.

Tired out, he was soon asleep, though he felt all his throbbing pain in the horrible dreams that came to him.

"Ain't you ever going to wake up, kid?" demanded a voice, as a rough hand shook his shoulder.

Joe opened his drowsy eyes with a shudder.

"You've slept past your breakfast, kid, and it's time to get up and go to court," continued the house policeman, shaking the boy once more.

"Can I wash up?" Joe asked, rising stiffly.

"Oh, you won't need that," came the grinning answer. "Our judges haven't any eye for beauty. You can wash when the court gets through with you."

Shambling, for he was stiff from head to foot, Burton followed the officer.

He was led out through a rear door, in a crowd of other wretched-looking prisoners, all of whom were forced into a covered wagon.

Bang! The door at the hind end was shut and locked on them.

After a jolting, bumping, rough trip our hero found himself being transferred to the guard-room of one of the police courts.

"Get upstairs with you," ordered a court officer, roughly. Joe stumbled up the stairs, somehow.

He was so sore and dazed that nothing mattered much now!

He came out through a door into a stuffy, foul-smelling court-room—came out into the prisoners' pen, where some forty wretches awaited punishment for whatever they had or had not done.

As for Joe, when he stepped into that pen, his gaze fell on just one human being among them all.

"Frank!" he shouted, despairingly. "Oh, Frank!"

Then he rushed blindly across the pen, while Frank Holden, looking equally wretched and equally startled, rose and tried to reach him.

"Stop that noise down there!" came the gruff order from a clerk above.

A court officer threw himself between the boys, shoving them apart.

"Now, you two quit your nonsense. No; you don't need to talk to each other. Sit down and shut up!"

Under that brutal order the trembling boys found seats on the benches.

Prisoners were tried and sentenced—hustled away, and new ones brought in in their places.

"Joseph Burton!"

Joe started, but did not quite comprehend.

"Joseph Burton to the bar!"

Our hero rose and stumbled forward to where he had seen other prisoners standing.

"Frank Holden!"

Only too glad to get close to his chum, Frank came quickly, though tremblingly, forward.

"One case at a time," interrupted the judge.

"Your Honor, these two boys belong to the same case. They've been pals."

It was Officer Gimp's voice speaking.

Joe heard him and dully turned.

There was another policeman standing beside Gimp.

"What's the charge against these youngsters?" asked the judge.

"Vagrancy, your honor, for want of a better charge," Gimp responded. "These boys have been hanging out in tough resorts for weeks. Sometimes they have money, and sometimes they don't. But they're always around with hard characters. I have some evidence, Your Honor, that these boys have been working as messengers for a Pete gang."

"Pete gang?" queried the judge, severely.

"Yes; Your Honor. A gang that is suspected of using knockout drops for drugging people," Gimp explained.

"Why didn't you bring those other witnesses here?" demanded the court.

"Why, I think Your Honor will understand the kind of witnesses they would be," lied Gimp, glibly. "Even the witnesses are a low lot, like the people these boys have been hanging out with."

To Joe's utter amazement, Gimp went on to lie glibly about both of the prisoners.

The other policeman, after being sworn, backed Gimp up.

"Now, what have you boys to say?" asked the judge. "You, Burton?"

"It's all a lie," Joe asserted, wrathfully.

"Oh, I suppose so," mocked the judge. "If this charge isn't true, tell me how you've been living."

Joe gave a half-hearted account of how they had lived since reaching New York.

But when he came to the tale of the stranger who had met them, clothed them and provided them with money, the judge broke in, drily:

"A stranger did all that for you in New York, eh? I guess that will be about all, Burton."

"But if you would only get Reporter Easton, from the Chronicle, to come here," pleaded Joe. "He would tell you that I am telling the truth."

"Reporters don't run this court," snapped the judge. "I've heard enough, Burton. You're both vagrants, all right. I commit you both until you're twenty-one!"

"What's that?" screamed Joe. "Oh, don't say that, Your Honor! We——"

"Take them below," directed a clerk.

Down through the guard-room they were hustled and into a cell.

"Oh, Frank!"

"Joe!"

"Is it true that we're alive, Frank?"

"This must be a dream, Joe—a nightmare!"

"I'm afraid not," sighed Burton. "Frank, it's all up with us. We might as well give up trying. We started as the No-Good Boys, and we can't down the name! No-good, indeed! Prisoners until we're twenty-one!"

"I can't quite believe it yet," gasped Frank, as he sank down on a bench.

"We haven't even a friend to send to!"

"Lawyer Stone?" hinted Holden.

"What's the use?" demanded Joe, bitterly. "The Downeys would tell their yarn, and he wouldn't believe us!"

"Then I don't see what's to be done," sobbed Frank, brokenly.

"Frank, old fellow, you smell of liquor! How on earth did that happen?"

"I don't know, Joe. When you got into that fight last night I tried to help you, but I was knocked down and didn't know any more. When I came to I was in a place that must have been a den of thieves. I tried to make them let me go, but they only laughed at me. I fell asleep, and then they must have sprinkled me with liquor to make me smell like a drunkard. This morning a policeman came and took me away. Then I was sent to this fearful place."

"And there isn't a bit of show to fight," groaned Burton. "If there was, I'd feel better. But what can we do in a city where the police band together against innocent people, and where the judges won't listen to the truth? Even Bert Easton, the reporter, went back on me!"

"Easton? Reporter?" questioned Holden.

Then Joe told the story of how he had sought the aid of the press, and of how he had been abandoned to Gimp at just the moment when help was needed most.

The hours dragged by. Wherever they were to be taken, the authorities did not appear to be concerning themselves about this unimportant pair of prisoners.

Frank was failing fast under the awful strain.

Twenty-four hours more of this, and Frank Holden would be raving ill.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

"Burton and Holden? They're down this way."

Joe nudged his dejected chum.

"'Rouse up, Frank!'

"Eh?" asked Holden, looking wearily up.

"Somebody coming for us."

"Going to take us away, eh?"

"I guess so."

"Hope there's a bath and a bed where we're going."

But Joe did not hear.

He had leaped to his feet at sight of a familiar face peering in through the grating.

"Mr. Stone!" he gasped, imploringly.

It was the Stony Brook lawyer beyond any question.

"I seem to have gotten here just in time," said the lawyer, drily.

"Frank! Frank!" Don't you realize who it is?" quivered Joe.

Holden came wearily toward the cell door, then gave a sudden, if feeble, start of pleasure.

"What a time I've had trying to find you youngsters," murmured the lawyer. "My man," to an attendant, "won't you be good enough to unlock this door?"

Like two people in a trance Joe and Frank moved out into the corridor.

Lawyer Stone grasped the hand of each boy, then led them to a bench nearby.

"How on earth did you come to be here?" gasped Joe.

"A hard enough time I've had to find you," sighed the lawyer. "Just after the Downeys left town—did you know they're in New York somewhere—I had news for you. I had a notion you might be here in this town, so I came over to look you up. What a chase I've had. But to-day, in an early evening newspaper, I saw a short item about your being sentenced as vagrants. What can it all mean, Joe? But, no; I won't ask you now. All I want is to know enough, so that I can go before the judge who sentenced you."

"Then here's some one who can tell you!" cried Joe, struggling to his feet and peering wildly down the dim corridor. "Oh, Mr. Easton!"

"Oh, there you are!" hailed the reporter, coming forward with swift, eager steps.

He gripped Joe's hand.

"I saw what had happened to you in an evening paper," went on the reporter, rapidly. "But how did it happen?"

"How did you happen to drop out just when I needed you most?" Joe cross-questioned.

"It's all the doings of that accursed Gimp!" grunted Easton, sheepishly. "I thought I had that cop scared enough, so that he would do the right thing. He swore he would. So I hurried back to the Chronicle office. Later Gimp telephoned me that all was lovely, and I supposed it was. But now——"

Easton stopped, compressed his lips, then clicked:

"I see the swift finish of Gimp. Revel, the cop who appeared against your friend, will be in the same boat! Oh, I've got some grudges to satisfy! But tell me."

Then Joe fell to, helped out in his recital by Frank.

Lawyer Stone and the reporter listened wonderingly.

"Mr. Stone," cried the reporter, at last, "aren't you and I wasting time? The judge will be gone home in another half-hour. Come along, sir!"

Joe and Frank were taken back to their cells, but they went with light hearts now.

Nor was it long ere Lawyer Stone and the young reporter were back, this time with a signed discharge for the two young prisoners.

Reporter Easton now took charge of affairs with a rush and a swing that made things hum.

He had a cab quickly at the door through which the two country boys had entered hours before as prisoners.

Once the cab had started, Joe sought to find out the reason why Lawyer Stone had come to New York to find them.

"Oh, that'll keep for a little while," replied the lawyer, closing his lips. "The first thing to do is to see you as near comfortable at the hotel as it can be managed."

New suits were purchased as quickly as it could be done. At the hotel Lawyer Stone engaged a suite of rooms with a bath.

Into a hot tub went Frank first, and then Joe.

Joe felt almost blissfully happy as he lay on his sofa and closed his eyes after his bath.

"Poor boy!" he heard some one say, at last, and opened his eyes.

Mrs. Downey, her face wet with tears, stood over him.

Just back of her, looking wholly shamefaced, stood Farmer Bill Downey.

And there, just a little further off, her face wretchedly pale, stood Tess Downey.

"Oh, my poor boy!" sobbed Mrs. Downey, when she saw Burton looking at her.

"I'm a fool, lad," groaned Mr. Downey.

But Tess held back.

"Tess!" called Joe, softly.

She came forward, quickly, then, sinking on one knee beside the sofa and hiding her face against his coat.

"Tess," murmured the boy, stroking her hair softly, "you don't really believe I'm no-good, do you?"

"Oh, Joe!" she cried, piteously.

"It's all right, then," murmured Joe Burton, happily. "I don't blame you, at all. If ever boys had every appearance against them for a while, we certainly were IT. But how's Frank?"

"He's resting out in the other room," answered Mrs. Downey. "I'm going in there and look after him."

Bill Downey seemed to think that Frank needed him, too, for he followed in his wife's steps.

"Tess," whispered Joe, "do you remember what you promised me one afternoon? That we were always to be friends, and that you wouldn't believe ill of me? That you'd always be pleasant and kind, and think well of me, no matter what other folks thought?"

"Don't Joe, don't!" sobbed Tess. "I did promise, and then, the very first thing, I turned against you with the rest of the world. Joe Burton, you'd better not want me for a friend after this. I'm not the kind that stands the test!"

"Don't cry, Tess," he begged, stroking her hair again. "I'm so happy, just now, that I don't want to see any one feel badly."

"I wish I could do something to make you feel a good deal happier," cried the girl.

"You can."

"How?"

"You'll have to get your face a good deal closer to mine for a start, Tess."

Dumbly she obeyed.

Then Joe caught her head suddenly, drawing her lips down tightly against his own.

"Do you understand, Tess?" he whispered, as she drew her head up in pretty confusion.

"I—I think I do," came the low reply.

Lawyer Stone stepped into the room and came over toward the young people, drawing up a chair close to the head of the sofa.

"Joe, I've just told Frank, and now I guess you'll be glad to hear the news that brought me to New York to find you. The railroad people are behaving themselves, at last."

"They're going to settle for my little property?" quivered Joe, flushing and sitting bolt upright.

"They have settled, already," corrected the lawyer. "The money's in bank to your credit, my boy."

"Did they settle decently?" demanded the boy.

"Well, rather. You see, lad, the canvass for the legislature has begun out our way. There's going to be a hot fight between the two parties this year. The crowd that's in is favorable to the railroad. The other crowd is trying to get in. The fellow in the opposition party who's running for the legislature down our way heard about the shabby way the railroad used you. He was going to make that a part of his argument in the campaign this fall. The railroad folks were afraid it would cost 'em pretty dearly, so they came to me and wanted to settle."

Lawyer Stone leaned back and chuckled before he went on:

"The railroad people told me they were ready to pay the four thousand that you had demanded."

"Did they really pay it?" cried Joe.

"Er—no. You see, Joe, I knew what was in the wind. So I told the railroad lawyers that, in view of the way they had torn down your home, I thought the courts would award a higher sum. Bye and bye they offered six thousand dollars to settle the case out of court."

"And you took it?"

"I didn't. I waited, and the next offer was seven thousand."

"Great!"

"It's got greater, though, Joe. When the railroad folks found I wasn't in a hurry, they came up to eight thousand dollars. That was about as high as they'd be likely to go, and there's no use in being a hog, so, as your guardian, I sold the matter out, and, Joe, there are now eight thousand gold dollars in bank for you!"

Joe felt stupefied, at first. Before he could think what to say, Lawyer Stone had strolled out of the room again.

"Tess," whispered Joe, with a mischievous smile, "I can follow your advice now."

"What was that, Joe?"

"To buy a store and some decent clothes, and be respectable."

"You'll do that last thing, all right."

"When a fellow gets older, Tess, it takes two to be respectable."

Tess colored, but he drew her face again down to his.

Easton flashed in and then out. He took a swift look around, saw that things were going swimmingly, and appeared to be contented.

"I've put those two cops in pickle," he announced. "Orders have gone out from Headquarters that Policemen Gimp and Revel are to be suspended this evening. They'll be tried, soon, and broke from the force."

Slick Ike was caught, convicted and sent to Sing Sing.

Among other things, our hero hunted up the clergyman who had "staked" them for their first start.

"I guess you'd better pay that money to Mrs. Downey," smiled the Rev. Mr. Ambrose. "It was Mrs. Downey and her daughter who gave me the funds and sent me down to the Fall River Line pier to see if I could find you. It seems that you had gained their gratitude by saving the young lady's life, and that you had refused to take any reward for it."

So Joe, thereupon, had another topic to talk over with Tess.

But he has many more topics now to talk over with her. They discuss things across the table at every meal.

The Downeys went back to Stony Brook, though not before Bill Downey, in his eager haste to get rich, had dropped ten thousand dollars in worthless mining shares. After that jolt he went back to Stony Brook and farming.

Joe and Frank are partners in the general store at Stony Brook these days.

Their store has grown greatly, and they are prospering.

Frank Holden may wed one of these days, but, for the present, he drops in often to see how happily Joe and Tess are living.

Neither young man, nowadays, is referred to as being "no-good."

They have successfully downed that tough name.

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